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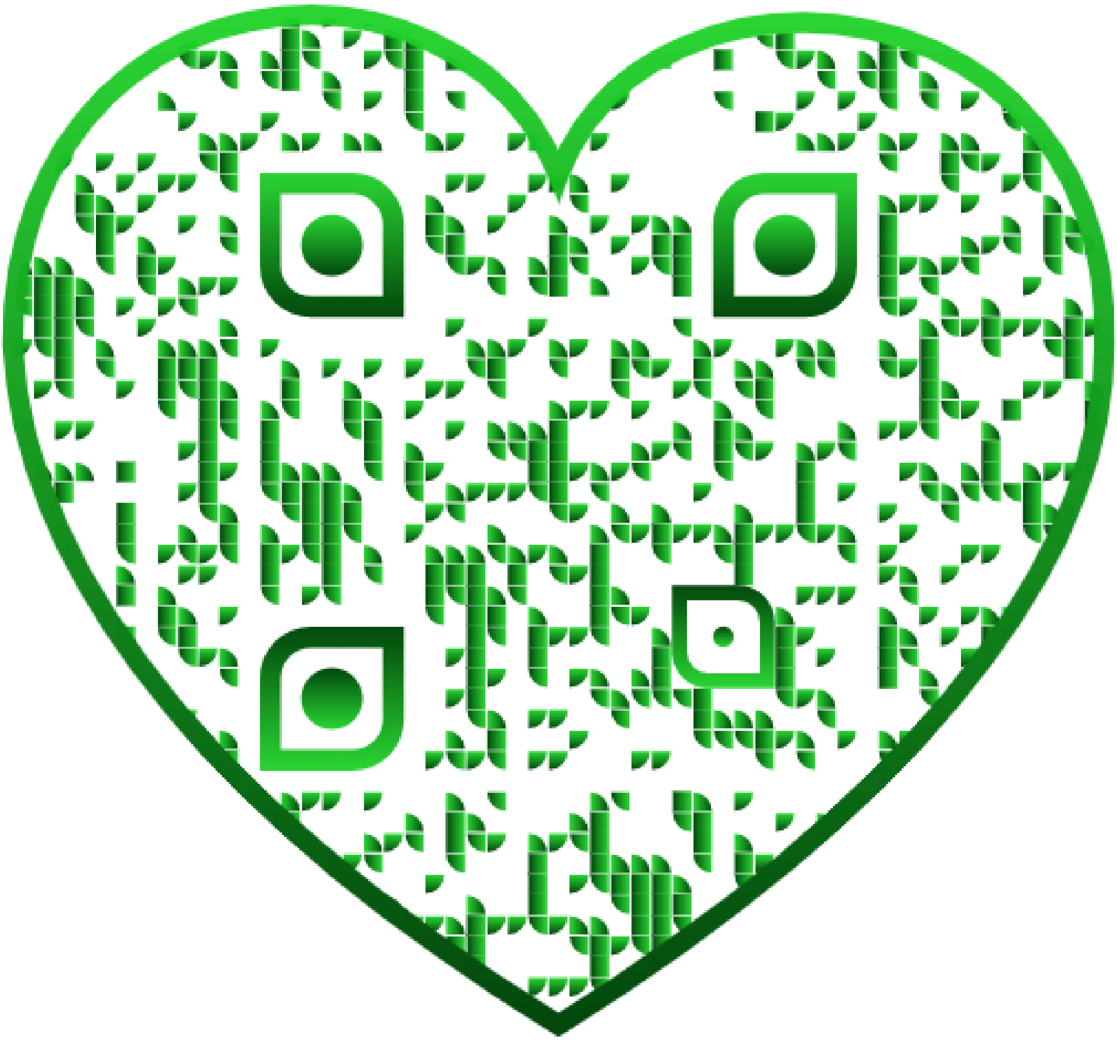
AERO OBSESSED

P. 10
THE BRILLIANT CERVÉLO S5 AND THE GLORIOUSLY IRRATIONAL PURSUIT OF SPEED.



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VOLUME 66
FALL 2025

Inside

HAVE DOG, WILL TRAVEL
P.46

Sean Fraenkel

ON THE COVER / THE CERVÉLO S5 PHOTOGRAPHED BY TREVOR RAAB. SCAN TO READ OUR REVIEW. →

Inside

FEATURES

P.22 WHY YOU NEED A BIKE FIT
It's like getting a custom bike without the steep price tag. *By Pavlína Černá, Molly Hurford, and Christa Lagler*

P.30 ALL HAIL THE BIKING GODDESSES
The fiercest sisterhood in cycling. *By Peter Flax*

P.46 HAVE DOG, WILL TRAVEL
A Jack Russell and his human ride 750 miles across the world's oldest desert. *By Sean Fraenkel*

P.56 ALONE. ON A BIKE. IN THE DARK.
How riding at night helped me find my light. *By Reginald Dwayne Betts*

P.66 ISO: THE SOUL OF CYCLING
Is tradition stifling Italian cycling? Italy... has thoughts. *By James Startt*

P.76 TUBES ARE BACK!
The powerhouse performance upgrade that won't break the bank. *By Dan Chabanov*

← P.86 CYCLING'S FORGOTTEN HEROES
Revisiting the historic rides of the 25th Infantry Regiment Bicycle Corps. *By Erick Cedeño as told to Latria Graham*

P.100 DUDES IN THE DOLOMITES
Bonding and biking and eating all the cheese. *By Jake Stangel*

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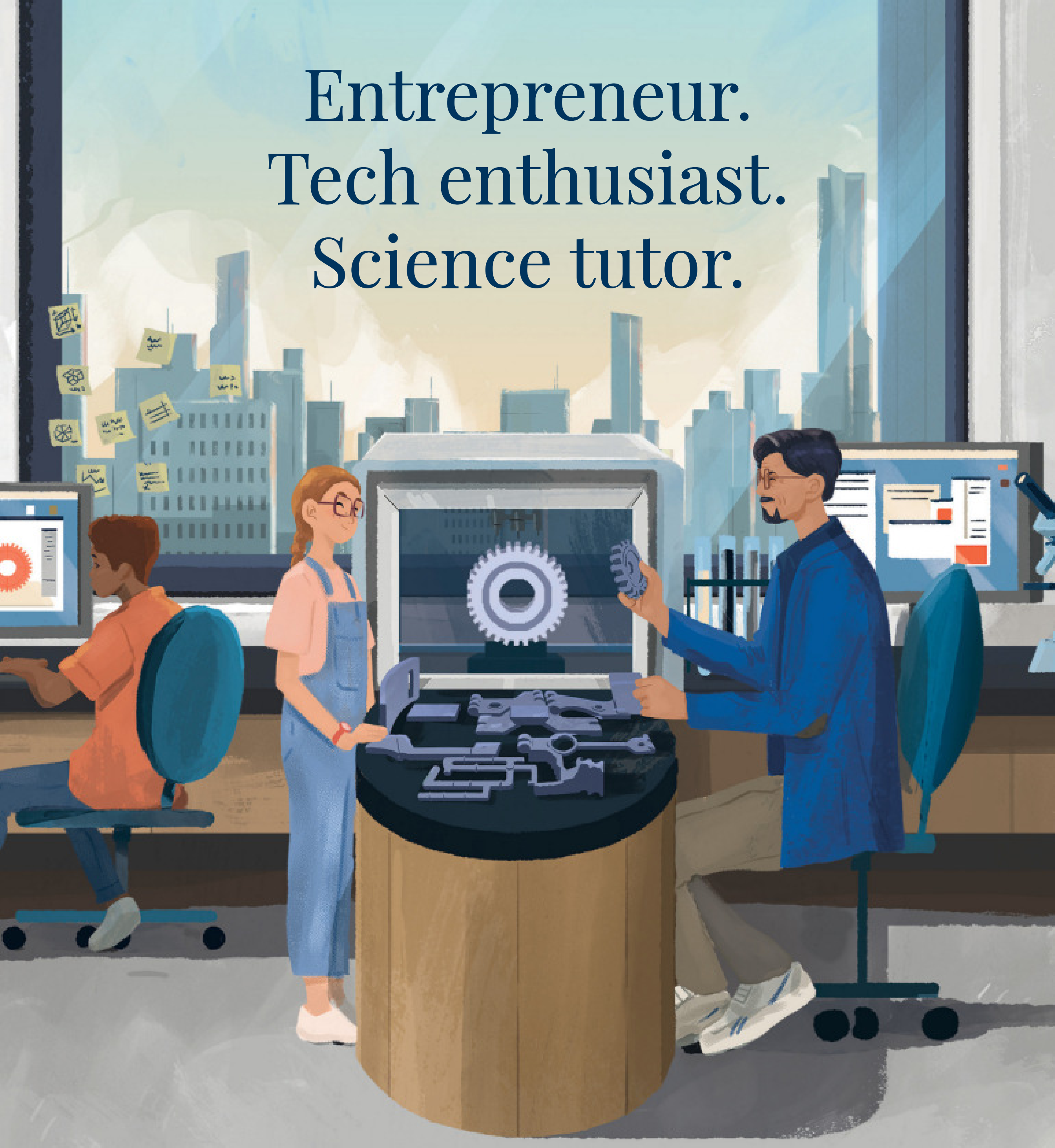

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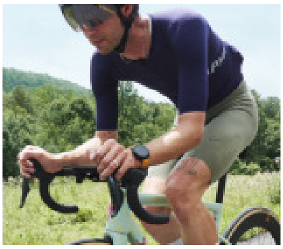
Inside

DISPATCHES

P.8 THE BEST THING TO HAPPEN TO GRAVEL BIKES

The big-tire trend means more options than ever in this popular bike category.

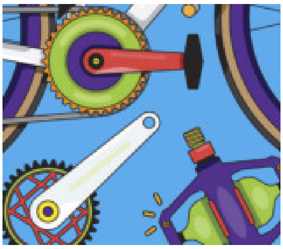
By Matt Phillips



P.10 I WENT FULL AERO-WEENIE TO CLAW BACK A KOM

How many seconds did I save? (a) one, (b) two, (c) three, (d) zero. Answer on page 11.

By Dan Chabanov



P.12 IT'S TIME TO SHAKE UP YOUR SETUP

I always resisted even the slightest change to my bike. I was so wrong.

By Tara Seplavy

P.16 CAN WE PLEASE GET REAL ABOUT BODY WEIGHT?

Why I won't tell my personal-training clients to lose weight.

By Natascha Grief

P.20 A NEW BIKE CAN TEACH YOU THINGS

I bought a steel mountain bike and the result was... unexpected.

By Trevor Raab

From top: Michael Byers; Trevor Raab; Jamie Cullen; Samantha Mash; Trevor Raab

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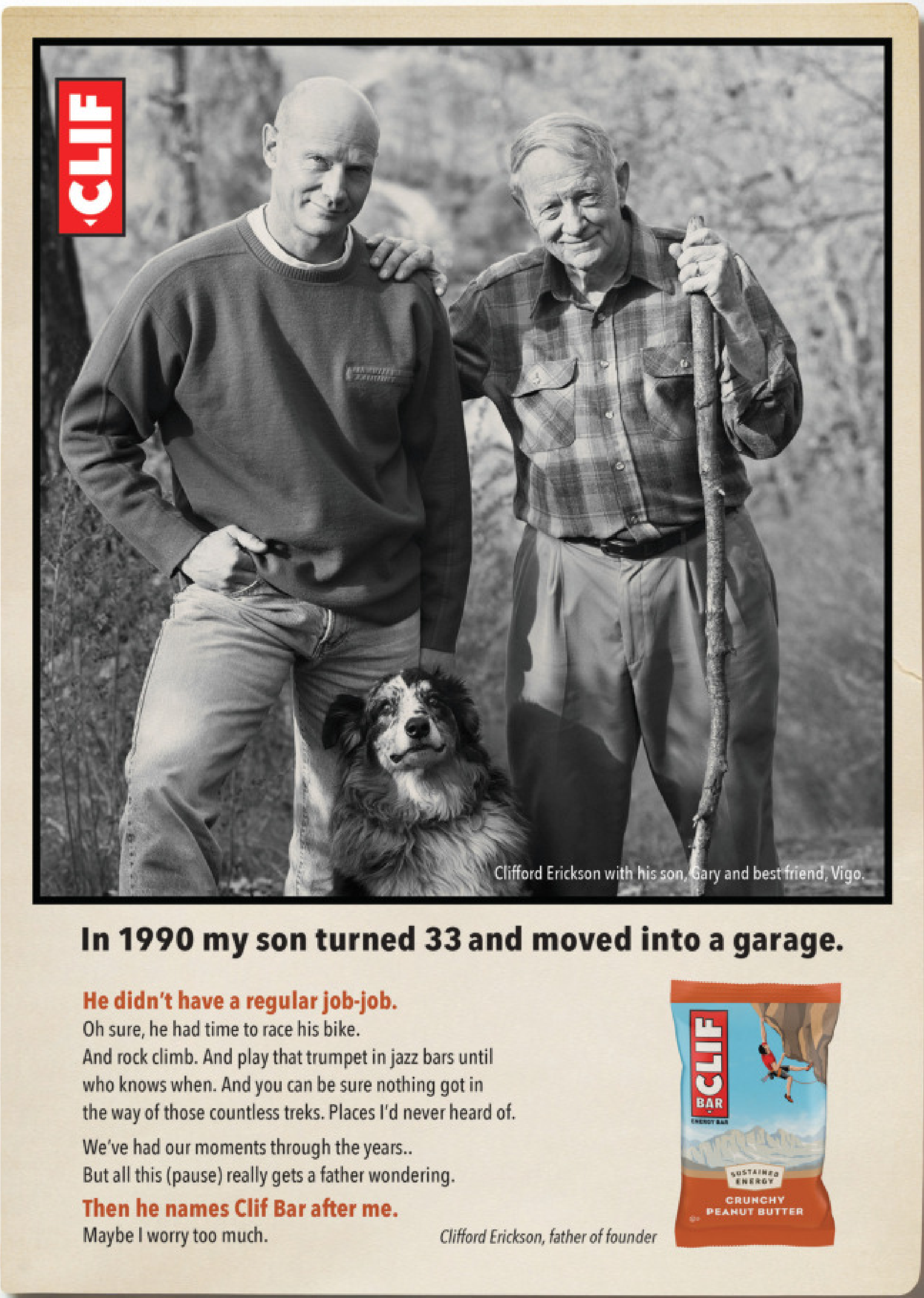
My Father (Clifford Erickson) would have turned 100 this year… I miss him.

Gary Erickson (CLIF BAR Founder)



Clifford Erickson with his son, Gary and best friend, Vigo.

In 1990 my son turned 33 and moved into a garage.

He didn't have a regular job-job.
Oh sure, he had time to race his bike.
And rock climb. And play that trumpet in jazz bars until who knows when. And you can be sure nothing got in the way of those countless treks. Places I'd never heard of.

We've had our moments through the years..
But all this (pause) really gets a father wondering.

Then he names Clif Bar after me.
Maybe I worry too much.

Clifford Erickson, father of founder

Republishing a CLIF ad first aired in 2003

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MORE GREAT STUFF LIKE THE STORIES IN THIS ISSUE

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HOW I RECLAIMED MY KOM FROM AN OLYMPIAN / P.10

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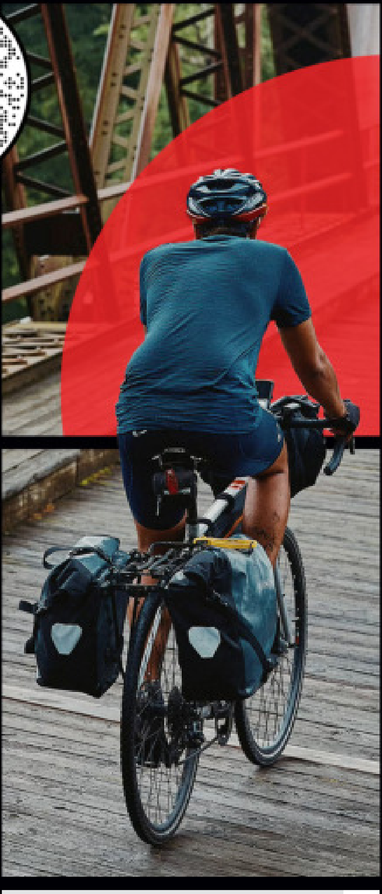
THE 2025 TOUR DE FRANCE MADE IT OFFICIAL—AERO IS KING, WEIGHT IS HISTORY



IF YOU LIKE

THE FIERCEST SISTERHOOD IN CYCLING / P.30

CHECK OUT

THE ALCHEMISTS

IF YOU LIKE

ROCKY'S EPIC ADVENTURE ACROSS THE WORLD'S OLDEST DESERT / P.46

CHECK OUT

BIKEPACKING AMERICA'S LONGEST MULTIUSE TRAIL NETWORK

IF YOU LIKE

GRAVEL BIKES ARE CHANGING. FINALLY. / P.8

CHECK OUT

THE BEST GRAVEL BIKES FOR RIDERS WHO WANT TO DO IT ALL →

IF YOU LIKE

IN THE SLIPSTREAM OF CYCLING'S FORGOTTEN HEROES / P.86

CHECK OUT

BLACK CYCLISTS WHO PAVED THE WAY FOR THE SPORT AND CULTURE

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by **Matt Phillips** | illustration by **Michael Byers**

GRAVEL BIKES ARE CHANGING. FINALLY.

I'VE PREVIOUSLY ARGUED that there are too many gravel bikes with little distinction among them.

Have you ever wondered why so many are out there? I believe I know the answer. I've ridden on roads in several countries around the world. A paved road is a paved road. I can take my road bike anywhere, and I'm confident I'll have the right gear for the ride.

The same can't be said for gravel roads. Their roughness and composition vary hugely. The champagne gravel of Steamboat Springs, Colorado, for example, is much different from the punishing rocks on the roads around Emporia, Kansas, that make up the Unbound Gravel race route.

But even saying gravel is different by region or geographic zone isn't adequate: Gravel is so variable that nearly every gravel road is unique, and they often change by the mile. My local gravel roads in Durango, Colorado, are so diverse that on some a 30mm tire is sufficient, while on others a 45mm tire is preferable.

This is why, when you enter any bike shop in any location and ask to see a road bike, the salesperson will likely guide you to the same equipment. But if you ask to see a gravel bike, the salesperson is likely to respond: "What kind?"

In this way, gravel bikes are like mountain bikes. It's not a monolithic category; many brands have numerous gravel bike families in their portfolio. Specialized, for example, has three families: Crux, Diverge, and Diverge STR. And when each brand has several gravel bike families, the result is a lot of gravel bikes.

The problem lies in how brands have created various gravel bike categories that ultimately aren't very different. Much of the supposed differentiation among gravel bikes is superficial.

But a recent development has introduced more purposeful differences that will end up helping more riders find models with features to suit their needs. And it's beginning to shake up the category.

The trend is toward increasing use of 53–57mm wide cross-country mountain bike tires, which began when some racers realized that for certain types of gravel, a tire that wide offered an advantage over the standard 42–45mm. The reasons: If the surface is very rough, a wider tire rolls faster. If sharp rocks abound, a wider tire is more resistant to flats. It's hard to see obstacles when riding in a fast-moving group, and wider tires are more forgiving if a rider is surprised by an unseen bump or hole. But because many riders' gravel bikes were designed when 45mm-ish clearance was all that was required, they were jamming in the biggest tire their bikes could (barely) fit, often causing damage from the tire or mud scraping away frame material.

The demand for such high tire clearance quickly outpaced development, leading to very few performance-oriented gravel bikes safely fitting such wide tires. Even as recently as earlier this year, new race-oriented gravel bikes were still debuting with less-than-50mm clearance, while racers wanted bikes that could accommodate 57mm tires.

That's changing, though, and we're beginning to see more high-performance gravel bikes with room for large tires.

I've tested this trend by outfitting a 3T Extrema Italia—for a long time, one of the only high-performance gravel bikes with 57mm tire clearance—with various mountain bike tires, most notably the 57mm (2.25-inch) Maxxis Aspen ST 170 TPI tires. And I can attest to mountain bike tires on a gravel bike being a real game changer—much faster, smoother, more forgiving—and providing much more confident handling.

Recently introduced bikes, such as the second-generation Allied Able, Argon 18 Dark Matter, and Fara Gr4, officially fit 57mm tires, joining the likes of 3T's Extrema Italia and the Storm Makai in the big-clearance club. Many more gravel bikes with enhanced tire clearance (that I've tested but are still under embargo for now) are on the horizon. Not all of them will fit 57mm tires, but increasingly, 50mm and above will be the norm.

Here's the thing, though: Not all gravel rides and gravel riders need 57mm tires every day. Despite the trend's popularity, I believe things will settle down, and monster gravel tires will be something pulled out of the quiver as conditions require.

Tire selection is the foundation of gravel racing. If I wanted to compete in as many events as possible, I'd—with 100 percent certainty—get a gravel bike with aerodynamic frame shaping that fits 57mm tires, likely the Allied Able, so I could use them when needed. Because when the big tires are an advantage, they're a huge advantage. (I'd still ride 45–50mm tires in most events, though.)

But I'm not racing, nor am I planning to. And for my daily gravel riding, a quick, agile, tight gravel bike like Cervélo's new Aspero 5 is better than one with huge tire clearance.

What's important is that the Cervélo and the Allied are more than superficially different.

The Allied has 57mm tire clearance and geometry designed to accommodate a suspension fork without any fit or handling compromises. It's ready to take the best tire for any racecourse and has gobs of clearance for muddy races when fitted with narrower tires. It also has geometry that offers mountain bike–adjacent stability on rougher terrain.

The Aspero 5 has only 45mm tire clearance, but it's more aerodynamic and has road-adjacent mannerisms—in my size, its wheelbase is nearly 40 mm shorter than the Able's. That makes it feel sportier on less severe terrain than the Allied.

The takeaway here is that brands are finally starting to take risks in the gravel category, finding ways to improve their products and meet riders' needs instead of rushing to join a trendy category with another similar bike just to claim a spot.

I still think we have too many gravel bikes that are too alike. But this tire trend has, finally, created some real choice in the gravel category. ***B***

With a career spanning 30 years and thousands of bikes tested, Senior Test Editor Matt Phillips continues his quest for the ideal drop bar bike.

by **Dan Chabanov** | photograph by **Trevor Raab**

HOW I RECLAIMED MY KOM FROM AN OLYMPIAN

I HAVE AN unusually fast coworker. His name is Bobby Lea, and I could spend many paragraphs describing his palmarès, but the highlights from his professional racing career spanning from 2006 to 2016 include his three Olympic trips for Team USA in 2008 (Points Race and Madison), 2012 (Omnium), and 2016 (Omnium). He also grabbed a bronze medal in the scratch race at the 2015 UCI Track World Championships.

So I wasn't shocked when I received an email from Strava informing me that Bobby had claimed one of my lunch ride KOMs near *Bicycling*'s office in Easton, Pennsylvania. Still, the notification stung a little bit, as it arrived on my birthday. (To be fair, Bobby didn't know.)

While my competitive career was far less prolific than Bobby's, I did manage some decent rides in my years of racing, mainly in cyclocross with a UCI podium and a U.S. Masters National title. But whenever I lined up against Bobby at a race start, I knew that my best bet was to follow and hope I could hang on. If I got lucky and had good legs that day, Bobby would drag me far enough along before inevitably dropping me to let me score a decent result for myself.

Now that Bobby and I work at *Bicycling* together, we enjoy a bit of friendly competition. As soon as Bobby took my KOM, I knew I had to at least try to get it back. Being a test editor, I do have a sizable pile of go-fast gear that could help bridge the gap in our physical abilities.

Any reasonable optimization effort will start with the terrain. The segment we're fighting over is a 3.4-mile section of road with an average gradient of 3.3 percent. But those statistics don't quite capture the whole picture. In reality, the climb consists of four steep sections of around 8 percent with small downhills, followed by a few mellow stretches that bring the overall gradient down.

Bobby and I are somewhat different riders. I'm 6 feet tall and weigh 145 pounds, while Bobby is about 30 pounds heavier and a few inches taller. In theory, I should have some advantage on the two steepest sections, but throughout the segment, Bobby is able to do about 80 watts more, making him faster everywhere else. This means that my goal is to get as aero as possible to squeeze as much speed out of the watts I am capable of on the mellower sections of the climb.

My biggest advantage in this quest is that Bobby is on a 10-year-old race bike. His 2015 Cervélo S5 is by no means a slow bike and was well ahead of its time in terms of aerodynamic design (which is bad for me). However, Bobby is also a traditionalist (good for me), using a very wide and very round handlebar, relatively shallow wheels, butyl tubes, and a typical summer helmet that prioritizes cooling over aerodynamics. And he certainly does not resort to anything goofy like aero socks and water bottles.

My bike is a Specialized Tarmac SL8—not the most pure aero bike currently on the market, but the deep head tube, fork, and narrow seatpost make it quite slippery against the wind while still making it one of the lightest aero-optimized bikes available.

To eke out as much speed as I could, I decided to go full aero weenie (like a weight weenie but for aero gains). Step one was to use some very deep 57/64mm wheels from Reserve, set up with TPU inner tubes (to shave weight and reduce rolling resistance) with a set of 30mm Cadex Coton Aero Tires. Step two involved swapping a round 40mm bar for a 38mm aero-shaped Specialized Rapide handlebar. Finally, I did my best to optimize my clothing, going with a Rapha Aero Jersey, no-name aero socks from AliExpress, and POC's Procen Air Road Helmet.

In total, my aero upgrades added up to $3,976. So, did they work?

I claimed the crown back from Bobby by just 1 second (11:43 vs. 11:44). In raw power output I was outgunned, with Bobby doing 397w to my 319w. Even factoring in our weights, the numbers were not favorable for me, with Bobby doing 5.05w/kg to my 4.85w/kg. In simple terms, Bobby can push on the pedals harder—and yet I managed to be a second faster by being more aerodynamic.

Getting a little more nerdy, if I estimate the Crr (the coefficient of rolling resistance) of the segment at 0.0054 (smooth pavement is around 0.005, gravel is 0.006, and this road is relatively beat up), and since I know our power and our speed, I can calculate how aero we both were (our CdA, or coefficient of aerodynamic drag). For me, it's around 0.35, while for Bobby, it comes out to 0.457. If I plug my Crr into the calculator with Bobby's power and weight, it gives a time of 11:08. Meaning, all things being equal, Bobby could have gone around 35 seconds faster than me.

Is that worth $3,976? I'm not sure I could say yes with a straight face, especially in the context of winning back a Strava segment from a coworker. But it's also true that when the gap is as small as one second, the cumulative total of those marginal equipment gains is the difference maker.

And I needed all the help I could get against a literal Olympic athlete. ***B***

Test Editor Dan Chabanov is a former racer and a current dad to an energetic 2-year-old. With less time to ride, he's turned to squeezing every last bit of speed from his gear.

DAN HAD THE KOM. THEN BOBBY GOT HIS HANDS ON OUR COVER BIKE, THE CERVÉLO S5, AND CALLED IT "EFFORTLESS FLIGHT." SEE IF DAN IS STILL GLOATING AT BICYCLING.COM.

illustration by **Jamie Cullen**

by **Tara Seplavy**

IS YOUR BIKE SETUP HOLDING YOU BACK?

UNTIL RECENTLY, I had always resisted making big or sudden adjustments to my bike setup. I feared that any changes might negatively affect my riding position, comfort, power, or speed. My seat height, crank length, saddle shape, bar width, reach, and stack were nonnegotiables. I wasn't willing to throw away years of trial and error or experts' recommendations—my measurements were backed up by bike fits. I like what I like. (I'm even very selective about my bar tape and grips.)

Then, after years of riding in my "perfect" setup, I started dealing with a recurring saddle sore; I knew something needed to change.

Throughout our lives, parents, teachers, managers, partners, and friends have told us how beneficial it is to try new things. While bicycle technology constantly advances and options for components, clothing, and gear are seemingly endless, cyclists remain a rather stubborn bunch. But after spending the first half of 2025 challenging more aspects of my setup than I probably had in the past decade (which led to improved comfort and performance), I'm here to say the same thing: It's time to change your bike setup and try new approaches.

Sure, that's easy for me to say. After all, a big part of my job is riding and testing new bikes and gear. And almost every day, new cycling equipment shows up at my desk from different brands in all sizes for my colleagues and me to check out. However, while I embraced and constantly swapped parts to evaluate function, I was extremely hesitant to change the fixed dimensions of my bike setup.

Surprisingly, the adoption of new equipment trickled down from a particular group of cyclists known for their resistance to change: professional road racers. After decades of acceptance, gear choices like rim brakes and tubular tires, for example, are now out of vogue, virtually gone from the peloton in less than five years. Meanwhile, equipment like aero bikes and wide tires are in. Along with new high-carb fueling strategies and highly monitored training, modern tech has increased the peloton's speed and changed racing tactics.

Bike and component brands have noted to me that the early adopters tend to be younger racers. And these riders' openness to new technologies and willingness to challenge long-held equipment norms have pushed formerly inflexible teams and mechanics to embrace changes themselves. The impact of using the gear showed up in the podium results. Now even seasoned pros embrace new gear and features to keep pace with the fast-rising up-and-comers.

I'm certainly not a professional racer, but the shift in mindset by veteran pros is also a lesson to old-schoolers and change-resistant riders like myself. If embracing new approaches in order to gain comfort and speed is good enough for elite racers, it's good enough for me. Maybe my resistance to changing my bike setup was based more on tradition and history than anything else.

In an effort to resolve my saddle sore issue, I tried custom seats, and two manufacturers

WHY DO MANY OF US STICK TO THE SAME MEASUREMENTS WE USED YEARS AGO, OR USE OLD-SCHOOL GEAR WHEN WE CAN RIDE MORE COMFORTABLY WITH NEWER TECH?

recommended switching to a wider saddle. It worked; the problem went away, and I was more comfortable on the bike. It opened my mind to making other adjustments; the gates unlocked to more possible changes.

Next, a bike with a long reach prompted me to push my saddle position forward to achieve my desired reach. That small change moved me closer to the bike's center; I was more comfortable on the saddle and produced a little more power. It also took some pressure off my hands and wrists and better balanced my weight for cornering.

Suddenly everything was fair game.

I switched to a narrower flared handlebar, and I liked that too. The bar reduced some shoulder aches and improved my riding speed.

And then I adjusted a once-sacrosanct measurement: my crank length. By swapping 175mm for 165mm, the discomfort in my knee subsided without a noticeable drop in power.

Now, changes like these are individual: what worked for me may not work for you. Luckily, if you change a measurement or component and it doesn't lead to improvements to your riding, you can usually switch back to the old one rather easily—and although you might lose a little money on the resale of a part, if you don't ride it that much, it won't lose a ton of value.

Not all changes were successes for me—but none were outright failures. My switch from Shimano SPD-SL clipless pedals to Time pedals lasted only a couple of weeks before I reinstalled my trusted Ultegra pedals. I wanted to like the Time pedals, but I couldn't adjust to the slightly different motion needed to clip in and out. It wasn't bad; it just wasn't for me.

Although my Time pedals experiment was short-lived, trying them prompted me to reposition the Shimano cleats farther rearward on my cycling shoes. Although I have ridden with my cleats slammed back on my mountain biking shoes for several years, I was hesitant to reposition them on my road shoes. The result surprised me; again, more comfort and better bodyweight distribution on the bike. (Though I did experience toe overlap on one of my road bikes—the tip of my shoe grazed the front tire on very tight turns.)

Our bodies change as we age. We might develop new pain points, or gain or lose weight; perhaps we lack the flexibility or power we once had. So why do many of us stick to the same measurements we used years ago, or use old-school gear when we can ride more comfortably with newer tech?

You don't have to change for change's sake, but if you're feeling some new aches or just want a more comfortable-riding bike, you might only be a few small adjustments away from a smoother ride. Some changes will work, some may fail, but I guarantee you'll learn more about your bike and riding needs than you currently know. ***B***

While Deputy Editor Tara Seplavy is new to riding 165mm crank arms on her road bike, she embraced short cranks on her mountain bikes more than 20 years ago to gain pedal clearance over rocks and roots.

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by **Natascha Grief** | illustration by **Samantha Mash**

I'M A PERSONAL TRAINER. HERE'S WHY I DON'T TELL MY CLIENTS TO LOSE WEIGHT.

IN MY 10-PLUS years of working as a personal trainer, new clients have often come to me with fitness goals that include "losing weight." During their intake session, I push them to articulate specifically what that means to them.

Every person's answer is unique (although the terms "toned" and "muscle definition" come up a lot), but what they almost universally have in common is wanting to become leaner. In other words, their goal is to change their body composition by losing body fat and gaining lean muscle.

Leaner doesn't necessarily mean lighter. This distinction is so important, and it's why I refuse to use the term "weight loss." Words matter much more than we often realize, and just because a phrase is common doesn't make it accurate. And when it comes to "weight loss," it's important that we get it right.

Weight isn't just a metric, like max heart rate or respiratory rate. There are no morally loaded associations put upon a person's average resting heart rate, for example; a lower resting heart rate isn't some higher ground that bears relevance to someone's worth as a human being in our culture.

Weight is different. What a person weighs is weaponized in our society and used as a reason to judge, stig-

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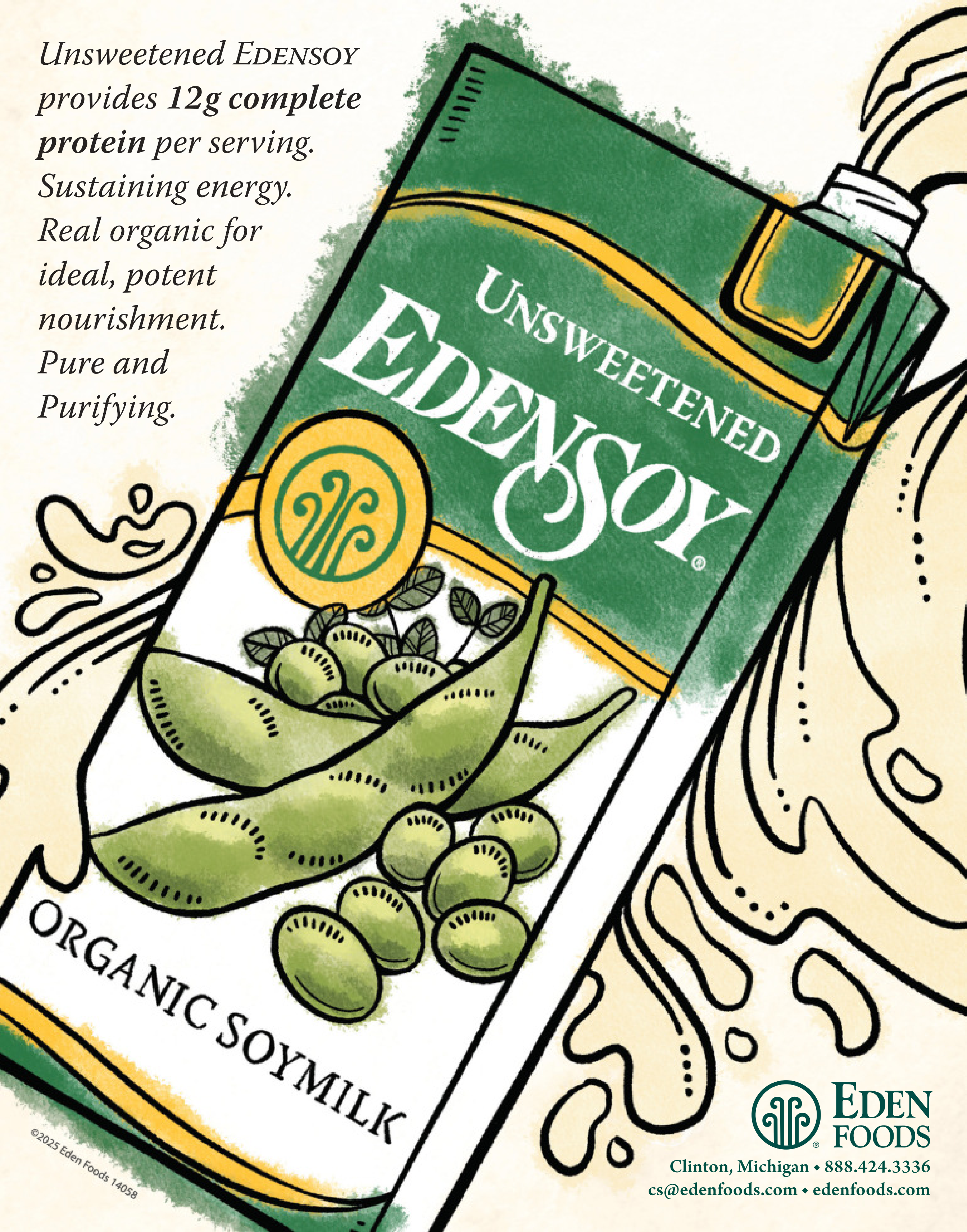
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matize, look down on another person, or punch down on ourselves. For too many of us, that number on the scale becomes entangled with our perception of our worth, and that can have bad consequences. Even in 2025, that entanglement is still loudly reinforced almost everywhere we look in our culture.

And because weight is different, so is using the term "weight loss."

One of the things I work on with my clients is reframing their thinking around weight. We don't talk about "weight loss," and I specifically request that new clients stop using the scale for at least three months. Instead, before their first session, we do an InBody scan, a noninvasive body composition analysis that measures various components, like body fat and muscle mass using bioelectrical impedance, and documents their body composition. After three months, we do another scan.

The client who solidified my elimination of the term "weight loss" came to me years ago. She was fixated on losing weight and the number on the scale, and it was hard to get her mind around not judging her progress that way. But she promised to try.

She followed the training program I gave her to the letter. She overhauled her nutrition and focused on intuitive eating instead of counting calories. She made sure she got enough protein and water daily, cut out added sugars, started getting at least seven hours of sleep each night, and learned ways to manage her stress levels. Over time, she got stronger and had more energy. She felt great both mentally and physically. In short, she was crushing it.

At the three-month mark, she gave in and weighed herself at home. When she arrived for her next session, she was in tears (literally), completely defeated. Why? Because after working so hard, her weight didn't really budge. She was frustrated, angry, and painfully disappointed.

I asked her if she'd like to do a new body composition scan. I had witnessed her progress, and I knew that her bodyweight was not telling her the full story. Her initial response was, "What's the point?" But she eventually agreed, and together we looked at her initial and current body comp reports side by side.

And there it was: She had lost three pounds of fat and added about four pounds of muscle. The report also detailed the body fat loss and muscle gain in her arms, legs, and torso. Later that day, she texted me that she had tried on a pair of jeans that hadn't fit when she started training, and not only did they now fit, but they were comfortably loose.

In other words, she was much leaner, which was ultimately what she meant by "losing weight." However, because how much she weighed didn't really change, she thought she had failed.

"Losing weight" is generally thrown around as a catchall term that boils a complex subject down to a sound bite. But bodies, goals, and lives are far more layered than that, and if someone comes to me for "weight loss" (and to be clear, that's "if"), it's important we unpack what that really means to them. Once the layers are peeled back, it's rarely—if ever—about simply weighing less when they step on a scale.

Don't get me wrong, body change goals aren't a negative thing, and if the body-neutrality movement has taught us anything, it's that however we want to change—or not change—our body is an individual, morally neutral choice. And if body composition change is your goal, my advice is to ditch your scale and stop basing your progress on bodyweight alone. Instead, settle into the understanding that body composition change is a long-term, "change the way you live" thing, not a three-month "drop 10 pounds by summer" checkbox. Measure the ways your body is changing using methods that have nothing to do with how much you weigh—like my client did with her jeans.

The most important question is: What do you want to feel like in your body? Ultimately, that is the goal that will serve you best. ***B***

Service Editor Natascha Grief has been a bike mechanic, a frame builder's apprentice, a fitness studio owner, a Spin instructor, and a few different things at different bike companies. She loves teaching people how to move with more strength and less pain.

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by **Trevor Raab** | photograph by **Trevor Raab**

THE STEEL BIKE THAT REDEFINED HOW I RIDE

OVER THE PAST few years, I've grown increasingly disenchanted with the chase of new bikes. I've been riding predominantly carbon mountain bikes for a decade, but they have started to feel a bit replaceable. I suppose that's the nature of plastic bikes: They're engineering marvels for a few years until the lighter, stiffer version drops. I found myself wanting something with a little more staying power.

I was also hungry for a new, longer-travel mountain bike, and after a few seasons of riding some steel cyclocross and road bikes, I began to consider the benefits of that material across other, more demanding disciplines, like enduro and bike park riding. Steel offers a ride quality that's a bit smoother than some of the stiffer modern bikes; the material allows the bike to flex in a way that can lead to a very stable, confident feeling across rough terrain. So I started researching steel enduro bikes.

There were the obvious choices, like Starling or Reeb brands, that offered perfectly good options, but as much as I love just riding bikes, I also enjoy finding something more off the beaten path. That's how I stumbled upon Rå Bikes. On paper, the brand's custom build checked most of my boxes, like T-Type components compatibility, around 165 mm of travel, and mixed or 29-inch wheel options. As a bonus, it fit the parts I had on hand and had some good looks. So I called the U.K.-based builder Ralph Richardson and we chatted about his process. Ralph has been dialing in his craft since he was a teenager, when he built himself a 29er DH bike to race the 2013 UCI World Cup Fort William. It was clear from the jump that he was incredibly invested in creating the best possible mountain bike and believed in steel for more than just the fashion of it. We talked about his plans to add more adaptability to the next round of bikes. I got in his queue.

A few months later, Ralph delivered a beautifully crafted Rå Bergsra ready for my curiosity to run wild on. The aforementioned adaptability included more geometry adjustments than most riders will ever need—from 435, 445, and 455 length chainstays to a four-position leverage curve flip chip that makes the bike more progressive with more support deeper in the travel, as well as another flip chip so you can run mixed or 29-inch wheels. Plus it included a middle setting that can be used with either wheel size, not to mention an optional floating brake setup with two different anchor points to change the anti-rise characteristics and how active the suspension remains under braking. If all that sounds overwhelming, it's because it is. I, however, was very excited by the prospects.

At first, all the adjustability was appealing mainly because it would allow me to adapt my bike to my preferred setup for whatever mood or locale I may find myself in. Now, after six months of tinkering with settings across a range of trails, I realized it was more than just an adaptable bike. It was a learning tool. When I get to the top of a trail for another lap, I can take out a 4mm Allen key and, in a minute, adjust the leverage flip chip or the floating brake arm and completely change the feel of the bike's suspension—making the bike more progressive if I'm riding rougher terrain or more supportive in bermed corners like those at the bike park. Or I can adjust the floating brake arm to make the bike even more active when braking. It's given me the ability to better physically understand many of the characteristics associated with great new bikes—things like anti-rise, chainstay length, and leverage curves. On paper, I know what all of those mean, and sure, I've ridden a few different mountain bikes with very different characteristics, but I haven't had the chance to test things back-to-back the way this bike allows. I have a better grasp on how and why I prefer my bikes to feel the way they feel.

A couple of days after some much-needed summer rain, the trails should be in perfect shape, so I take the bike to one of my favorite local loops. After a steady mile-and-a-half climb, I sit atop roughly 500 feet in elevation, ready to descend. The trail drops off quickly with a few small gaps, straight into a quick turn. The short chainstays I paired with a 27.5-inch rear wheel make this section a breeze as I hop over some rocks and bend and flow the bike around the first few corners. The trail straightens out and my speed increases as I approach another sharp bend. The floating brake option, set at 65 percent anti-rise position, keeps the suspension active across the braking bumps and into the corner without any harsh feelings or getting pitched over the handlebar. I lift my front wheel up and over a big rock roll and quickly pedal across the access road. Over another large boulder and into some quick compressions, the bike stays composed. Keeping its progression chip one position back from its most linear setting offers that plush feeling but doesn't blow through the travel as I drop down the rooty mess between some trees. The terrain mellows for a bit and gives way to some flowy singletrack. As I traverse the hill, the steel frame offers a sort of planted feeling no other material can offer, an added smoothness that suspension setup alone doesn't achieve. I drop into a rhododendron grove with some fresh, loamy dirt that leads to a near-vertical dive between some jagged rocks to the trail below. Once again, the smaller rear wheel shines, allowing me to keep my center of gravity comfortably behind the saddle without the dreaded tire buzz. Coming out of the grove and pedaling along the creekside path, I simply think to myself, *Wooo, that was good!* ***B***

When not behind the camera, Senior Photographer Trevor Raab is usually riding or tinkering with bikes of all kinds. Before Bicycling, *he worked as a bike shop mechanic between freelance photo jobs.*

BICYCLING'S GUIDE TO THE PERFECT BIKE FIT

BY PAVLÍNA ČERNÁ, MOLLY HURFORD, AND CHRISTA LAGLER

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TREVOR RAAB

GURU
FIT SYSTEMS

JENNA FOLEY WISHES SHE DIDN'T HAVE TO LEARN ABOUT THE importance of a bike fit the hard way.

About a year after she had taken up cycling, Foley was ready to conquer her very first century. She and three of her girlfriends mapped out a scenic arch-shaped route starting in Philadelphia, meandering toward the picturesque town of New Hope, and then returning to Philly. They figured out nutrition for the day and pit stops they wanted to make; they were ready for a great time.

Foley didn't know anything about bikes back then. When she bought a crusty old Fuji on Facebook Marketplace, it was pure luck that it happened to be the correct size for her. A week before the big adventure, another rider commented on her Instagram story, telling her that she desperately needed a bike fit just by

Josh Wolff

Jonathan Blyer, a certified bike fitter, talks through a bike fit with Jenna Foley.

> **I GOT INJURED FROM RIDING IN AN IMPROPER POSITION. I KNOW I COULD HAVE AVOIDED PAIN IF I'D PRIORITIZED GETTING A BIKE FIT.**

watching her position on the bike, but Foley had no clue what they meant. She sat too upright, they told her, and her pedal stroke looked awkward. Foley adjusted her saddle height—what else was there to do? "There are things that, unless somebody tells you about, you just don't naturally know," she says.

On the day the four women picked for the big ride, October 31, 2020, the weather in eastern Pennsylvania was chilly and bleak. Like many cyclists, Foley thought that aches were an inherent part of cycling, so when her knees started getting cranky, she figured she was just getting tired and cold. Plus, the group was having so much fun, so she just kept pedaling.

The knee pain became much sharper around mile 60, joined by discomfort in her hips and the pelvic area from the pressure on her pelvic bone. By the time the four women rolled back into the parking lot (greeted by friends with balloons in the shape of 100), Foley could barely walk. "[The celebration] was tainted by the fact that I actually was in a lot of pain."

When the pain and swelling didn't subside after a few days, Foley knew she was dealing with more than just postride soreness. Through a series of x-rays, CT scans, and electromyography, she learned that she had detached her hamstring from her calf. In the process, she damaged a peroneal nerve in the back of her knee. The doctor gave her a choice: Did she want to undergo surgery to repair the nerve or do physical therapy and let it heal on its own? She chose physical therapy.

Foley was eager to get back to cycling. With the pre-century Instagram comment echoing in her mind, as soon as she got the clearance from her physical therapist four months later, she sought professional help from a bike fitter. One of the two biggest adjustments the bike fitter made was swapping Foley's saddle, picking one that was the correct width for her hips and angled in the right position. The second was adjusting the setup of her cleats. "I went from riding on a log in the woods to sitting in a Toyota Sienna," she says.

The next summer, Foley rode another century at a Delaware event, and the contrast couldn't have been

starker. “We were done in about five hours, and I just went about my day afterwards,” she said. “I learned that there is a difference between fatigue and pain, and pain is not something that you have to accept.”

Foley, now 31, went on to compete in criteriums and races like the Tour of America’s Dairyland. She made the women’s Category 5 podium at the 2022 Ardmore (Pennsylvania) Rock N’ Ride. These days, she doesn’t race, but through a partnership with Trek Bikes that sponsors her Pedal & Shine women’s monthly group ride, she helps build a community and spread awareness about safety and etiquette. And, of course, the importance of a bike fit. “It isn’t just about maximizing gains or only for people who are racing and want to be in the World Tour,” she says. “It’s for the cyclist who just wants to enjoy a pastime or a sport.”

A bike fit—and a bike that fits—is essential for any rider who wants to have a healthy (and happy) cycling life. But getting fitted isn’t a once-and-done thing. Because your body and riding habits change over time, it’s important to regularly examine how your riding position feels and make changes accordingly. Here’s your guide to the key moments you’ll want to reassess your fit—and how to make sure you’re on the right-size bike in the first place.

WHEN AND WHY YOU SHOULD MAKE ADJUSTMENTS TO YOUR BIKE FIT

Most people assume they only need a bike fit when things have become excruciatingly uncomfortable. But an adjustment to your position on the bike can help you get more efficient in your pedal stroke, support your body if you've gained or lost fitness, and allow it to better heal from a nagging injury. Here are seven common reasons to consider making tweaks.

YOU BOUGHT A NEW TYPE OF BIKE / Your measurements on one type of bike won't perfectly translate to a new bike. "Especially when going between different cycling disciplines, the optimal angles will change," says Willie Swift, a bike fitter at Human Powered Health in Boston. He adds that the maximum extension is going to be slightly larger with time trial bikes, for example, than with a road or gravel bike because you don't typically need the ability to be super nimble in your handling. "And 80cm mountain bike bars will mean a very different way of holding your upper body compared to your drop bars on your road bike."

YOUR STRENGTH OR MOBILITY CHANGED / Any change in strength, mobility, or flexibility—whether from a new gym routine, yoga practice, or an injury or health setback—can be a reason for a bike fit adjustment. Swift points out that if you've improved your mobility, you may be able to get more aggressive in your position, folding a bit lower over the handlebar to improve aerodynamics. Similarly, if you've improved your core strength, you may also find it's easier to stay in a more aero, low position for longer.

If you're injured and lose mobility, that can change your fit needs as well. "Imagine trying to touch your toes with tight hamstrings," says Alyssa Hillaby, a registered physiotherapist and bike fitter in Ottawa, Ontario. "Every time you reach the bottom of your pedal stroke, as you're bending your trunk to the handlebar, you're essentially doing that same forward fold motion." And although your legs are doing the pedaling, think about your body as a whole, Hillaby explains, meaning a lack of mobility in one area can affect the entire in-ride feeling. "A common one we see is a herniated disc or other back injury that's making sitting on the saddle intolerable. And back injuries like compressed discs can even physically change your torso length, which can require a new fit."

"Usually we say that a bike fit lasts for around two years," says Hillaby. "If you think of yourself two years ago, your mobility and strength are absolutely different than they are now."

DEALING WITH AN INJURY / You may be able to ride through minor injuries or even after some surgeries, assuming you're cleared by a doctor or physical therapist. But you may need a new fit to get comfortable.

Once you're back to your old self again, the fit that was more comfort-focused and allowed you to keep riding may no longer be optimal. "Your bike and your

bike position should reflect you in this current moment in time," says Swift. "Recovering from the injury is just as important as the injury itself—sometimes, we've made adjustments to the bike fit that were good during the recovery process but may be holding you back once you're recovered."

This is particularly important for injuries that necessitated adjustments to one side of the bike and body. "You might have made a positional change to let an injury heal or to address an asymmetry," Swift says. "Over time, with that new position, you might be able to heal that asymmetry, and then all of a sudden you're not riding exactly the same as you were when we made that correction." In cases like that where you expect to improve, it's good to have a fit checkup every six months to a year.

MAJOR CHANGE IN WEIGHT / Your weight—and where you carry it—can dictate the angles you're able to hold on the bike. If your midsection gets bigger, you may need to increase the upright position of your bike fit for extra belly room. If it gets smaller, you may be able to bend over the handlebar a bit lower and move into a more aggressive, aerodynamic position.

Don't be surprised if even things that seemingly shouldn't change with weight loss or gain suddenly feel different. Hillaby notes that with significant weight changes, you may need to swap out your current saddle. You may have felt fine on a cutout saddle, but after losing 20 pounds, it may start to cause chafing.

RIDING POSTPARTUM / The alignment of your pelvis and your comfort while sitting on the bike may change a bit after giving birth, which means the saddle that felt great before may now feel a little "off." You also may have lost some core strength, which can cause you to put more weight on the handlebar. "Because cycling tends to be something that women can get back to relatively quickly postpartum, it's even more important to make those fit adjustments," Hillaby says.

FEELING "STUCK" / If you feel like you've plateaued in terms of the watts you're able to hold, or you're not able to pedal as hard as you'd like to, a bike fit may help improve your efficiency. "We never claim that a bike fit is going to increase your power, but you might have an easier time maintaining that power," says Hillaby. "I had a cyclist come in, and we moved his seat up six centimeters, and while his power didn't change, he was able to hold his previous 20-minute power for a full 40 minutes with that shift."

Swift agrees—though he notes that a bad bike fit can certainly sap you of your ability to use the power you do have, so a proper fit may actually increase your watts in some cases. "Your on-bike position does have a pretty big impact on the amount of power that you can produce, how long you can [maintain] it, and which muscles you're using the most," he says.

YOU JUST DON'T WANT TO RIDE / Cycling culture tends to reward toughness—you push through the pain, you do the suffer-fest, you tell your legs to shut up. But Swift says these small issues causing pain and discomfort aren't always meant to be "pushed through." Often they can be addressed so you can both improve your fitness and truly enjoy the ride.

"It's important to listen to our bodies, and furthermore, listen to our emotions," Swift says. "A good indicator it might be worth checking your position on a bike is when you start having this sense of dread or disinterest in riding. Sometimes there's a small tweak to your fit that completely changes how the ride feels."

WHAT SIZE BIKE SHOULD YOU BUY?

There's no point in even thinking about getting a bike fit if you don't have the right size bike to start with. But determining your size can be as straightforward as deciphering an IKEA assembly guide.

When it comes to bike sizes and dimensions, the industry uses a frightfully arbitrary combination of metric and imperial systems, sometimes shifting between them depending on the weight or dimension question. That's if they're not using some other—sometimes literally made-up—system.

Mountain bike frame sizes are often listed in inches, while road sizes are usually listed in centimeters. But numeric frame sizing is falling out of favor as more brands adopt alpha sizing: small, medium, etc. Bicycle size designations are best for comparing different sizes of the same bicycle and not sizes among brands—because one brand's "medium" might be another brand's "small."

Experienced cyclists—especially bike fitters and mechanics—are used to this madness and fluent in the dialect of bicycle weights and measures. But if you're new to this world, it can be befuddling when the expert you're talking with jumps from pounds to grams, inches to millimeters, and so on while talking about a bike. Or if one brand's sizing charts look nothing like another's. Yes, this is all extremely confusing. We know. *Bicycling*'s editors live in this world and still get tripped up.

While not perfect, using your height to get an idea of your frame size is one of the easier solutions. Use the bike size charts on the right for road bikes and mountain bikes, but keep in mind that this is only a general guide. Sizing will still vary between brands.

Proper bicycle fit is important for comfort, performance, and injury prevention, and unfortunately, most bicycles are not one-size-fits-all like cars or motorcycles. So take your time, triple-check the numbers, ask lots of questions, and seek out second (or third) opinions about your bike size and other factors before you make a big purchase. ***B***

ROAD BIKE SIZE CHART

HEIGHT	BIKE SIZE (numeric)	BIKE SIZE (alpha)
4′10″–5′2″	47–48 cm	XX-Small
5′2″–5′4″	49–50 cm	X-Small
5′4″–5′6″	51–53 cm	Small
5′6″–5′9″	54–55 cm	Medium
5′9″–6′0″	56–58 cm	Large
6′0″–6′3″	58–60 cm	X-Large
6′3″–6′6″	61–63 cm	XX-Large

MOUNTAIN BIKE SIZE CHART

HEIGHT	BIKE SIZE (numeric)	BIKE SIZE (alpha)
4′10″–5′2″	13″–14″	X-Small
5′2″–5′6″	15″–16″	Small
5′6″–5′10″	17″–18″	Medium
5′10″–6′1″	19″–20″	Large
6′1″–6′4″	21″–22″	X-Large
6′4″–6′6″	22″–24″	XX-Large

WANT TO LEARN MORE?

Jenna Foley partnered with *Bicycling* as a host of the ***Guide to the Perfect Bike Fit***, our exclusive program that offers useful tips to help problem-solve on your own.

In the program, Jonathan Blyer, a certified bike fitter and co-owner of Acme Bicycle Co., discusses the right position of the saddle, handlebar, and cleats, as well as proper crankarm length and how to troubleshoot pain points.

Tune your bike setup to your body and transform your ride with this program available exclusively to *Bicycling* members.

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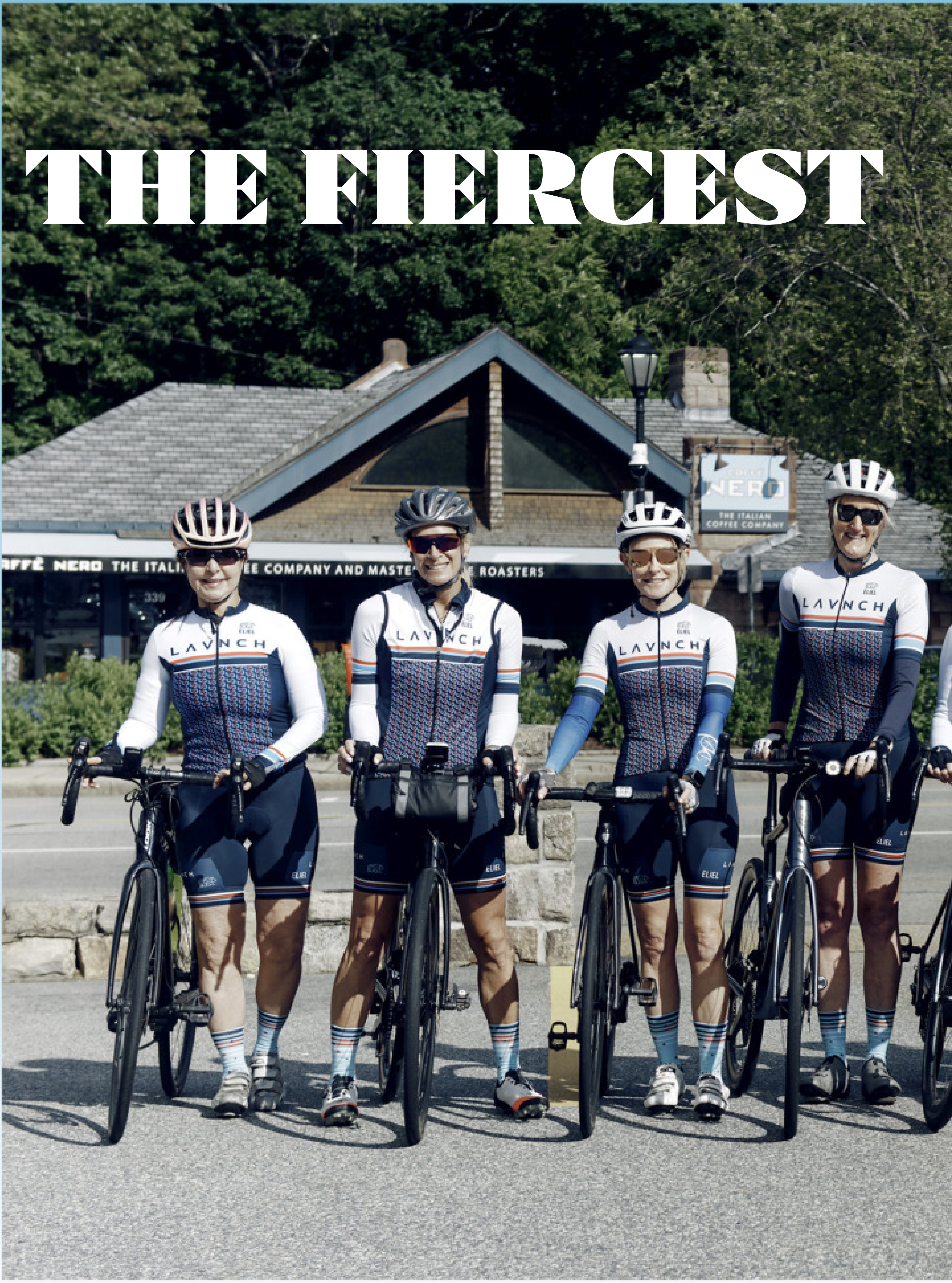
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IN CYCLING

These nine badass women have raised millions for cancer research—through sweat, loyalty, and the kind of bond that can't be faked.

BY PETER FLAX | PHOTOGRAPHY BY TONY LUONG

IF

If you've been to five (or five thousand) group rides, you know the drill. You pedal to a parking lot, wait for everyone to arrive or for the clock to strike a certain time, then you roll out. This one in Wellesley, Massachusetts—a leafy community about 15 miles west of Boston—follows that familiar script.

Nine riders in matching kits head south in a tight paceline. Within 10 minutes the group is cruising through a sylvan New England wonderland, past boggy wetlands and stately colonial-style manors under an endless canopy of shade trees.

The shared communion of a well-organized group ride is a beautiful thing—and it's on full display here. The riders call out obstacles and the occasional passing car. There are bursts of social chatter and moments when all you hear is breathing and the thrum of freehubs. There are a couple of tough uphill stretches where the paceline fractures, then regroups at the top before rolling onward. In these respects, this ride is like nearly every other group I've ridden with.

Otherwise, though, it's entirely different. First, all nine riders are women, ranging in age from 53 to 62, a demographic often underrepresented—even invisible—in cycling. I've been on hundreds of group rides and passed thousands more over my decades of riding, and I've never seen a group that looks like this.

But it's more than basic demographics. Most of the women have endured life-altering struggles. Four have tangled with breast cancer. One lost a child to a brain tumor. One is a 9/11 widow, and another was in the thick of the chaos at the 2013 Boston Marathon bombing. All of them have experienced the sort of existential challenges that define this phase of life—crises and health scares with kids, the undulating tides of careers and marriages, the aging and passing of parents.

Many of the women have ridden with each other for years. There have been countless morning rides and scores of long weekend rambles and some lovely multiday getaways, but the glue that connects them is the Pan-Mass Challenge. The PMC, which was founded in 1980 and benefits the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute in Boston, has raised more money than any other single athletic fundraiser in America. Just last year, the event passed the $1 billion threshold. These riders collectively have ridden the PMC more than 150 times and raised over $1.5 million. The PMC offers a variety of distances and formats, but these riders typically participate in the centerpiece ride—a two-day journey from either Wellesley or Sturbridge to the tip of Cape Cod that stretches over 160 miles. "The PMC is not the end of what we represent as a group," says group member Carie Capossela, a breast cancer survivor who has ridden the event 20 times. "But it is the start of it."

It's clear that the women are bonded by this deeply personal common cause. And they're all aware that this year the money they raise for Dana-Farber is more vital than ever, as the current administration in Washington seeks to defund

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In Wellesley this spring (above). After the 2025 Pan-Mass Challenge in August (opposite).

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Getty Images (film); Courtesy Nancy Saperstone (group)

biomedical research that historically has powered new cures and improvements in care.

For a while, the women called themselves the Biking Goddesses. For better or for worse, it was Nancy Williamson who coined the name: About a decade ago, they had a group text that someone had called Biking Ladies. "I can't stand how some college teams call themselves the Lady Cougars or whatever," Williamson says. "They're the Cougars as much as the guys." She decided to rename the chat Biking Goddesses—and it stuck. "I mean, it's a little much, right?" she laughs.

None of the women took that name too seriously anyway. Says Wendy Fischman: "I see it as princess-y. And we're the opposite in every way. Everybody's down to earth and more about the collective." They now call themselves the BGs, with the two letters discreetly gridded on their matching jerseys.

I've come to Wellesley ahead of the 2025 PMC to ride with the BGs and talk to them about their riding lives and the experiences that have shaped them more broadly. The banter is light, but these women have been through some shit together. One of them, Laura Olton, is an old friend of mine from college. She's had two separate battles with breast cancer and somehow remains one of the more upbeat people I've ever met. We're connected on several social media platforms, including Strava, so I've gotten a glimpse into how her riding life centers around the BGs.

The group has a rather voluminous and sometimes spicy group chat, where ride logistics and kit decisions and personal matters are hashed out. Many people in their 50s and 60s find that life can be isolating in various ways—where even busy people struggle to find meaningful connec-

BG group rides often include coffee; if pastries are involved, all the better.

tions beyond work and family—but the BGs have created a tightly knit community in which they can hang out regularly, train together, share a common mission to tackle a big summer ride, raise money for cancer research…and something deeper and more personal than that.

Says Lisa Hughes: "If you had told me 15 years ago that…I would meet this group of women multiple times a week and go on rides, I would have said, 'What are you talking about?' My life before the BGs was full, but my life with the BGs is much richer."

After a brisk 25-mile loop down to Medfield, the group cruises back into Wellesley. Nearly all of their rides these days end with coffee. The morning had been overcast, but now the sun is shining as everyone sips espresso drinks at a table outside Caffè Nero. While these women have known each other and trained together for years, the social aspect of the group really blossomed during the early years of the pandemic. "Before COVID, we didn't stop for coffee," says Fischman. "We really gelled back then. For most of us, it was our only social outlet."

When you ask the BGs about the time spent on the road together, they talk about their longest, toughest adventures. But they also talk about the ways a meaningful part of your life can unfold with good friends on a group ride—all the little moments, the things that transform a two-hour loop into an adventure, that turn a riding buddy into a close friend. The time they huddled in a church during a torrential downpour, the turtle they moved out of the road, or the time a bee flew inside Nancy's jersey. The unanswerable debate about why someone would leave a smashed head of lettuce in the road. The banter about *The White Lotus* and what the president said yesterday, the heart-to-hearts about chemo and dying parents, the pep talks about how to stand up for yourself at the office.

I've known for a long time that riding has the power to change people's lives in profound ways—to give them things like community and purpose and resilience. But the BGs seem to manifest some of these powers in ways I've rarely seen. "[We have] such different personalities," says Patti Quigley. "We can talk about almost anything. It helps how on a ride you are near someone but not face-to-face. People are more likely to just say shit that way."

Each of these nine women has her own story and deserves her own spotlight—but together, they've built something extraordinary.

PATTI QUIGLEY

> *I love the simplicity of [cycling] and the camaraderie and the coffee and the way your mind can go anywhere it wants.*

THE FIRST BLOW came in 2001 when Patti Quigley lost her husband, Patrick, on September 11. He was on United Airlines Flight 175, which was hijacked after its departure from Boston and then flown into the World Trade Center's South Tower. At the time, Patti had a toddler and was eight months pregnant.

A year later, Patti and another 9/11 widow started planning a charity ride from New York to Boston. It was an ambitious idea, because Patti didn't own a bike at the time. But since Patrick had ridden when he was younger, it seemed like a fitting tribute.

"We were raising money for women in Afghanistan," Quigley says. "The connection was that we were widows of a terrorist action, and now America was going to attack Afghanistan and make more widows…and for what reason?"

Quigley quickly fell in love with cycling. "I found it cathartic," she says. "I love the endorphins I get from it. I love the simplicity of it and the camaraderie and the coffee and the way your mind can go anywhere it wants. And I love how you can eat food and ride at the same time!"

Quigley rode her first PMC in 2005. "When I started, I didn't have any personal or family connection to cancer," she says.

That changed in 2008 when she discovered a lump in her breast. She underwent a lumpectomy, a round of chemo, and then radiation. She kept riding during most of her treatment, eager to get on with her life.

But then another curveball loomed. Quigley recalls being at the Natick Mall before Christmas in 2008 and getting a call from her oncologist. The doctor asked her to sit down. She'd ordered a chest MRI to make sure Patti's cancer hadn't spread, and the scan had revealed a heart defect. "At that point, I was like, what the fuck," she laughs. The diagnosis was an aortic aneurysm—an asymptomatic bulge in her aorta that could rupture if she engaged in intense physical activity.

Quigley was devastated at first. After a cardiologist said she'd need to keep her heart rate below 150, she thought her riding life was over. But eventually she reached a state of enlightenment. "I realize now that getting breast cancer saved my life, because otherwise I would never have gotten that MRI."

And, it turns out, her riding was hardly over. Quigley was back in business after getting a Specialized Turbo Creo SL e-bike. This summer marked Quigley's 21st PMC. "You still can work pretty hard on an e-bike," she says, noting that she always monitors her Garmin computer to track her heart rate—and how she takes long pulls at the front of group rides "to break the wind for my friends."

NANCY SAPERSTONE

> *Riding the PMC is a highlight of my year. It's the most impactful, motivating, phenomenal experience.*

NANCY SAPERSTONE ISN'T a cancer survivor. She hasn't endured cinematic crises. She isn't one of the faster riders or the loudest personality. But Saperstone is the kind of rider and personality that makes a group stronger.

Saperstone was a runner before she was a rider. She ran a couple of charity marathons in the late '90s, and she smiles recalling how a friend told her she was getting too old for marathoning. For her 40th birthday, she and her husband did a Backroads trip to Italy. "That was the beginning of more," says the 15-year PMC veteran.

While Saperstone repeatedly notes that she's one of the slower BGs, nearly everyone in the group calls out her endurance—how she's always trying to get everyone to tackle longer and hillier rides, like the B2VT (Boston to Vermont) event, a 100-plus-mile ride with 8,000 feet of climbing. It also turns out she's the group's resident flat fixer.

Some elements of Saperstone's life are in flux. She and her husband no longer live in Wellesley, splitting their time between Park City, Utah, and Chestnut Hill, about 10 miles from her former home. So joining morning BG rides is a challenge. "My husband would rather be in Park City," she says. "But I want to be home and ride with my friends."

Saperstone takes the training seriously. "In Boston and Utah, we don't start riding till March or April," she says. "So to get ready to ride almost 200 miles in two days by early August is not an insignificant thing."

Above all, it's the camaraderie that makes things click for Saperstone. "We know each other's quirks and can just laugh them off," she says. "This is just the most supportive group. We talk about everybody's kids and travel and husbands and lives. We have a lot of political discussions these days, and thankfully we lean the same way."

"Riding the PMC is a highlight of my year," adds Saperstone. "It's the most impactful, motivating, phenomenal experience. You keep passing people holding signs that say 'I'm here because of you'...I get a little choked up even thinking about it."

EUNICE GROARK

> *It was this place I could get away, where I wasn't the mom with a sick kid.*

LIKE LOTS OF people, Eunice Groark loved to ride bikes as a kid, loved the freedom she felt as she cruised around on her 10-speed. But then, like lots of people, she eventually stopped riding.

Everything changed in 2005. That's when her son Harry was diagnosed with a rare brain tumor after he started kindergarten. "That year he went through multiple brain surgeries," Groark says, adding that she learned about the PMC because one of Harry's doctors was riding to raise money for pediatric cancer research.

In 2007, Groark and her husband bought bikes and began training and fundraising for the PMC. "I was hooked—on both cycling and the event," she says. This year marked her 18th PMC.

Cycling became a form of self-care for Groark. "It was this place I could get away, where I wasn't the mom with a sick kid," she says, recalling the hours she spent talking to doctors and insurance companies and researching treatment protocols. It was also a place where she could work through her emotions. "There were days where I was so angry and could go out and say, I'm going to ride up this hill 15 times and pound it out."

Groark was the last person to join the BGs. For years, she trained and rode the PMC with a friend who eventually stopped riding. And then in 2020, Harry died. Groark contemplated giving up cycling. But ultimately she realized that she still loved cycling and the PMC. "It's therapeutic riding in his memory and going back to a community that supported me for 15 years," she says. "I still need to be a part of that."

A few years ago, the BGs, who had often seen her at the PMC and riding around town, invited Groark to join the squad. "I feel fortunate to be a part of a group with like-minded women who love cycling," she says. "The rides themselves are pretty quiet. At least for me. I mean, they zip right along—I'm quiet because I'm holding on for dear life."

Groark proudly describes her son and how he carried himself in his struggle. "He never complained," she says, noting that Harry loved to ride and how they rode together on a tandem, even after he'd lost his vision. "Harry loved to engage with people. He was the mayor at the Jimmy Fund Clinic at Dana-Farber. He knew everyone—all the nurses, the lady at the cafeteria, the parking lot attendant. He loved life. And he went through a lot." She thinks about that when she's feeling weary on a tough climb.

These days, Groark's riding life has evolved from therapeutic escape to aerobic bonding with friends. "I will ride as many days as my body will let me," she says, calling the vibe on BG rides competitive with kindness. "I realize how lucky I am that I can still do it. My legs may not work as great as they did 15 years ago, but they still work. I can still get up the hill."

LAURA OLTON

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> *This particular group of women and what we've created is really supportive.*

RIDING WITH LAURA means "there is no dead air unless we're gasping up a hill," says fellow BG Lori Johnston. "Ask her a question, and she'll give you a five-minute answer. But she is just sunshine."

Wendy Fischman, who used to live down the street, agrees. "Laura is the cheerleader for the group," she says. "She always reminds us how strong we are."

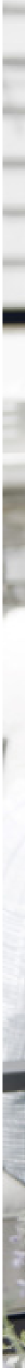
But where does this optimism come from? It's a fair question to ask of someone who's gone through not one but two bouts of breast cancer. "Someone once told me that your windshield is so much bigger than your rearview mirror," she says. "I just want to keep looking forward."

The first episode began in 2005. Olton was 37, with two little kids, new to Wellesley, active and healthy, and working as the general counsel for a public utility. But she felt a lump up high on her chest near a bra strap. She got an ultrasound and a needle biopsy. Soon she was on the phone with a radiologist hearing the words "breast cancer."

The weeks that followed were a blur. There were more tests, and at every turn the prognosis got worse. She wound up getting a mastectomy on the day of her daughter's kindergarten back-to-school night. After surgery, she went through radiation, a round of Herceptin, chemo, tamoxifen, the works.

"I wanted everything to seem normal," Olton admits. "But it definitely sucked. I got beaten up by the drugs and surgeries. I remember telling a friend, 'If you told me you'd pay me a million dollars to walk to the end of my block, I'd say keep your money.'"

Her husband, Matt, was into triathlons, and in 2006 he and a cousin rode the PMC. "I remember going to a lunch stop with the kids and holding up signs," she recalls. "It was emotional. They were riding for me." She recalls thinking Matt and the other PMC riders were hardcore.



In 2008, Olton was feeling healthy. She had a new job. Things were good. Then she felt something in her armpit. Her doctor told her to pop over to Mass General, and by the end of the day she'd learned it was a recurrence. "The first time I was really scared," Olton says. "The second time, I was super pissed off. Like, this is a fucking joke, why are you testing me?"

Another tough year followed, with more radiation and chemo. A couple of years later, with her recovery going well, Matt suggested that she ride the PMC. She got a road bike, and Quigley, who lived nearby, helped her get rolling. And in 2012, she and Fischman rode a one-day route. Before long, the woman who had thought PMC riders looked hardcore was riding the full two-day event in a tight paceline. "This particular group of women and what we've created is really supportive," she says.

Olton muses about the first time she watched her husband ride the PMC in 2006. "It's crazy to think about how it's changed. That first year he was scared and riding for me," she says. "And now I ride for others."

LISA HUGHES

IT WAS 2011 when she registered for her first PMC. Lisa Hughes and her husband had just bought a home in Wellesley, and her next-door neighbor happened to be PMC founder Billy Starr. At a party she told Starr that she was interested in doing the event. "He asked if I realized that I'd be riding for the rest of my life," Hughes says. "I laughed it off—but he was right."

The longtime runner didn't even own a bike. She remembers hooking up with Quigley, who showed her the ropes and did early rides with her to get into cycling shape. But on a training ride two weeks before her first PMC, someone crashed in front of Hughes at a railroad crossing. Hughes launched over her handlebar and broke her arm.

> *When I got on the bike, I had this epiphany. I don't need to talk about this to feel better. I just need to ride with these women.*

A doctor said she was a bit crazy, but after all the fundraising and riding she'd done, she went for it. With her arm in a cast propped up on the bar, Hughes left her gearing in the little ring all day and finished the 84-mile ride.

Hughes, a news anchor for the CBS affiliate in Boston, isn't a cancer survivor. But her life experiences have given her insight into loss and the power of the PMC community. Her husband, Mike Casey, is a 9/11 widower. And she was working the finish line of the 2013 Boston Marathon when two pressure-cooker bombs ripped through the crowd, killing three and injuring hundreds. She has vivid memories of the bloody chaos and heroics that transpired on Boylston Street.

A preternaturally upbeat person, Hughes admits that some anniversaries have been rough. "I don't think I realized how much [the bombing] was affecting me until the first anniversary," she says. "Only then did I realize that I'd been in a funk for a year. But the riding gave me purpose. It was great to be with these women. I could talk about it or not. I keep coming back to the word 'safe.'"

In 2021, around the 20th anniversary of 9/11, riding with the BGs proved therapeutic once again. "That was a particularly challenging year," Hughes says. "But when I got on the bike, I had this epiphany. I don't need to talk about this to feel better about what's happening. I just need to ride with these women. I don't have another group like that; I have a lot of friends, but we've been together through a lot."

After years of participating in the PMC and covering the event as a journalist, Hughes has crossed paths with many people whose lives have been touched by the ride. She describes a Dana-Farber researcher who studies leukemia and began riding at his uncle's encouragement; years later, that uncle was diagnosed with leukemia and was prescribed a drug the researcher had pushed through clinical trials.

She talks about a mechanic at Landry's Bicycles, a big Boston-area chain, who wrenched at the PMC for years before his son was diagnosed with a brain tumor. Now he knows researchers who are investigating that kind of cancer.

Hughes loves the vibe of the PMC weekend. "That feeling of people coming together with one cause," she says. "It's like this bubble of positivity. It feels physically so good."

LORI JOHNSTON

> "*I don't know what men talk about when they ride, but we talk about our kids and parents maturing—and we talk about food a lot.*

LORI JOHNSTON LOVES everything about riding—especially with the BGs. "Sometimes I don't even think, I just ride," she says. "It's like a zone. We see beautiful things. We have crazy experiences. You see life differently than you would in a car."

But Johnston almost quit a couple of years ago. The group kept getting faster, and she found it harder to keep up. As the oldest member of the group, Johnston's situation crossed a line. "Suddenly it wasn't fun anymore," she admits. "It was really stressful—I was riding at 95 percent all the time and it got exhausting. Finally, I was like I have to do something or I'm going to stop."

So in 2024, she bought a Trek Domane+ SLR 6 e-bike. "I didn't want to have to do it," Johnston says. "I just don't want to think about myself as an older person that needs an e-bike. But it has brought the fun back into biking. It's taken away the stress. You give up some stuff—you can't measure how much exercise you're getting in the same way. But I don't care that much, especially when the alternative is staying home while your friends are out riding."

Last year she brought her Domane+ on the PMC for the first time. She'd never taken it on such a long ride before, so she carried her charger in her bag. But she rode 109 miles on the first day and still had half a charge.

Johnston started riding in earnest around 2010. She had purchased a mountain bike and taken a course on off-road riding. She even rode that mountain bike on her first PMC, in 2012. She loved it and began riding regularly with many of the women who would become BGs. "We all had kids that were in school," she recalls. "We just talked about what we were going through. I don't know what men talk about when they ride, but we talk about our kids and parents maturing—and we talk about food a lot."

Johnston has not had to deal with the kinds of challenges that many BGs have faced, but she has grappled with plenty of other life struggles. Like when her father died five years ago. "It was completely unexpected," she says, noting that he had been active with no medical issues until a week before he passed. "It turned my world around. All the BGs were super kind and helpful. I care very much about each of these women. And I think everybody would say that. It's a real gift. We are very fortunate to have it."

But most days, it's just about the fun. About sharing adventures on peaceful country roads with friends. "I occasionally ride alone," she says. "But it's not as much fun as doing it with friends. Especially if there is coffee involved, and muffins and scones."

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> *I love the PMC because it is my weekend to honor my cancer.*

CARIE CAPOSSELA IS not low-key about her cancer experience. "We don't spend a lot of time talking about our breast cancer," she says. "But I like to talk about it, and the biking has been loaded with emotion." Capossela was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2001—she went through multiple surgeries, chemo, radiation, tamoxifen, and eventually reconstruction. The experience of thinking she might die and then recovering has left a lasting mark. Early in her treatment, her oncologist suggested she ride the PMC. "And I was like, 'Maybe I'll wait till my hair grows back,'" she recalls. "I had it in my head that if I hit the five-year mark, I would do it."

And in 2006 she did—riding the event and cofounding a program at Dana-Farber that supports young women with breast cancer. As she readied for her 20th PMC, she still directed her fundraising to that cause. Back in the day, some of the BGs used to ride the PMC in jerseys that read "Carie's Crew." Capossela admits she's sometimes nostalgic about her old squad, which was less serious about training and more serious about survivorship. "Riding the PMC is hard for me sometimes," she says. "There's a lot going on. It's heavy. I cry. [But] I love the PMC because it is my weekend to honor my cancer."

These days, Capossela isn't single-minded about cycling like she used to be. She moved from Wellesley to Cape Cod, which complicates joining BG rides. She spends more time strength training. And she's had some issues with an accelerated heart rate—her cardiologist suspects it's linked to residual effects from her radiation treatment, she says. As the BGs got more focused on training, Capossela thought about hanging up her road bike. Fortunately, her friend (and local racing legend) Tim Johnson pushed her to buy an e-bike. "I told Tim what I was struggling with," she recalls. "And he goes, 'Listen, if you're not riding, you're not with your friends. You're not doing something you love to do.'" Capossela, who presently owns a Specialized S-Works Creo 2, is gratified she can still ride with the BGs. "We hold each other up. And P.S., I'm leading a lot of the time because the ladies are smart. They're like, 'Put the people on the e-bikes in the front.'"

CARIE CAPOSSELA

WENDY FISCHMAN

"HILLS NEVER GET easy," says Wendy Fischman, "It doesn't mean I'm the fastest or the best. But I find the thrill of overcoming the challenge is so enjoyable that the challenge dissipates," explaining the flow state she enters on a tough ride. Unsurprisingly, Fischman typically is near the front on BG group rides when the terrain gets hilly.

And pretty much nothing holds Fischman back. On Christmas Day in 2023, the lifelong skier crashed on an icy patch, tearing her ACL, MCL, and meniscus—and breaking her tibia. But she remained fixated on riding the PMC the following summer.

She had to wait four long months to exercise. Then she attacked rehab and was back on her bike by Memorial Day. Her doctors said riding was fine but warned her not to use clipless pedals, because the torque of unclipping could reinjure her knee. So she rode the 2024 PMC in sneakers. "It was humbling," she says. "But it gave me a challenge."

> *The PMC is not competitive, but I think that sometimes men don't like it when an all-women group passes them.*

Fischman is reluctant to celebrate her athletic comeback too much. The responsibility she felt was so much bigger than that. As captain of the team that rides the PMC, she manages the group's interaction with a so-called Pedal Partner—pediatric patients at Dana-Farber who are paired with PMC teams. Theirs is a 6-year-old named Abby who as an infant was diagnosed with Stage 4 neuroblastoma in her brain. Abby has been cancer-free since undergoing chemotherapy. "Our team has really rallied behind her," Fischman says. "She's a total inspiration."

Fischman was a rock for her friend Laura Olton when she had cancer before either of them were riders. Fischman took her to chemo appointments and learned how to give her steroid injections. She remembers Olton sliding on a wig and trudging over to her house for dinner and falling asleep on the couch. After Olton finished her treatments, Fischman threw a surprise party, giving out bags of chocolate chip cookies with a sticker that said, "one tough cookie."

Fischman started riding a few years after that. Her husband bought her a road bike for her 38th birthday and before long, it was her favorite way to exercise. This year marked Fischman's 14th PMC.

Fischman says the chemistry of the group is unlike anything she's experienced. "I think it's rare for women," she says. "There's no drama. It doesn't seem competitive—everyone just wants what's best for everyone else. We couldn't look worse in the morning. And no one cares. I think that creates some kind of evenness."

Fischman, not one to mince words, says she doesn't like when men say things like "hey, move over for the ladies," when they're hauling ass at the PMC. "It can be a little patronizing," she says. "The PMC is not competitive, but I think that sometimes men don't like it when an all-women group passes them. But you know what? Screw you, we're faster than you."

NANCY WILLIAMSON

> *My riding life saves me—it gives me strength.*

NANCY WILLIAMSON STARTED riding about 15 years ago. Back then she was on a hybrid and thought 15 miles was a haul. But in 2011 she got a road bike and tackled her first PMC. Her father had died a few years earlier of colon cancer, and it seemed like a nice tribute.

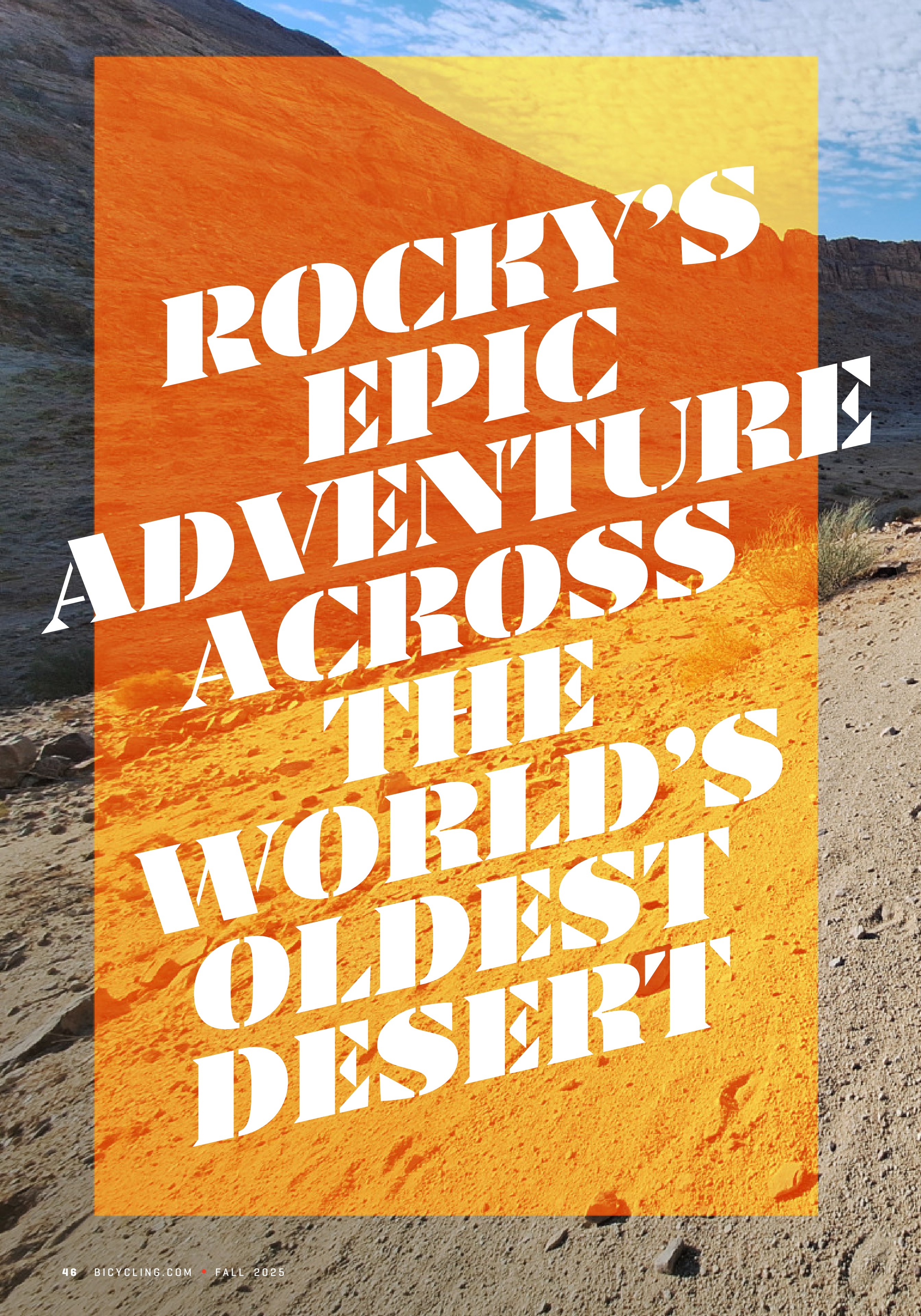
She's come a long way since then—nearly all the BGs mention that she's among the fastest, strongest, most hardcore riders in the group. (Fischman calls Williamson her ride or die.) "I like to go hard if I can," Williamson admits. "I don't want to just tool around."

Many BGs say Williamson is uncommonly kind. "She is the most supportive human being I think I've ever met," Fischman says. Williamson is the friend who always has a handwritten note or a batch of brownies when someone gets surgery or needs a lift. She's also the group's chief navigator.

The woman who has been there for everyone else and lives near the front of their paceline needed some support last fall. Williamson, who is in her 60s, became the fourth BG to receive a breast cancer diagnosis. "I've been healthy my whole life," she says. "But I do mammograms religiously and it came up."

Williamson describes her cancer journey as if she's lucky. She talks about how she's fortunate that it's Stage 1 and how her chemo is easier than other peoples' and how she has the most supportive friends and how she's been able to ride through the ordeal. "My riding life saves me—it gives me strength," she says, acknowledging that radiation has made her feel a bit fatigued. "But even if I'm tired, the camaraderie and being outside exercising gives me mental strength to get through this."

It's clear that Williamson loves cycling. "It's the trifecta of being outside, the exercise, and the companionship," she says. "It's a gift. I started this later in life and I've gotten better and faster over the years. And I love how I can go out with my friends and talk through anything. It's like free therapy." ***B***



ROCKY'S EPIC ADVENTURE ACROSS THE WORLD'S OLDEST DESERT

A SCRAPPY JACK RUSSELL TERRIER AND HIS FEARLESS HUMAN PEDAL 750 GRUELING, WINDBLASTED MILES ACROSS THE NAMIB TO RAISE MONEY FOR ANIMAL WELFARE.

WORDS AND IMAGES BY SEAN FRAENKEL

Above: While the desert tested the author's reserves, it was pure entertainment for Rocky.
Right: Packed with gear, dog, and water, the touring setup weighed 155 pounds.

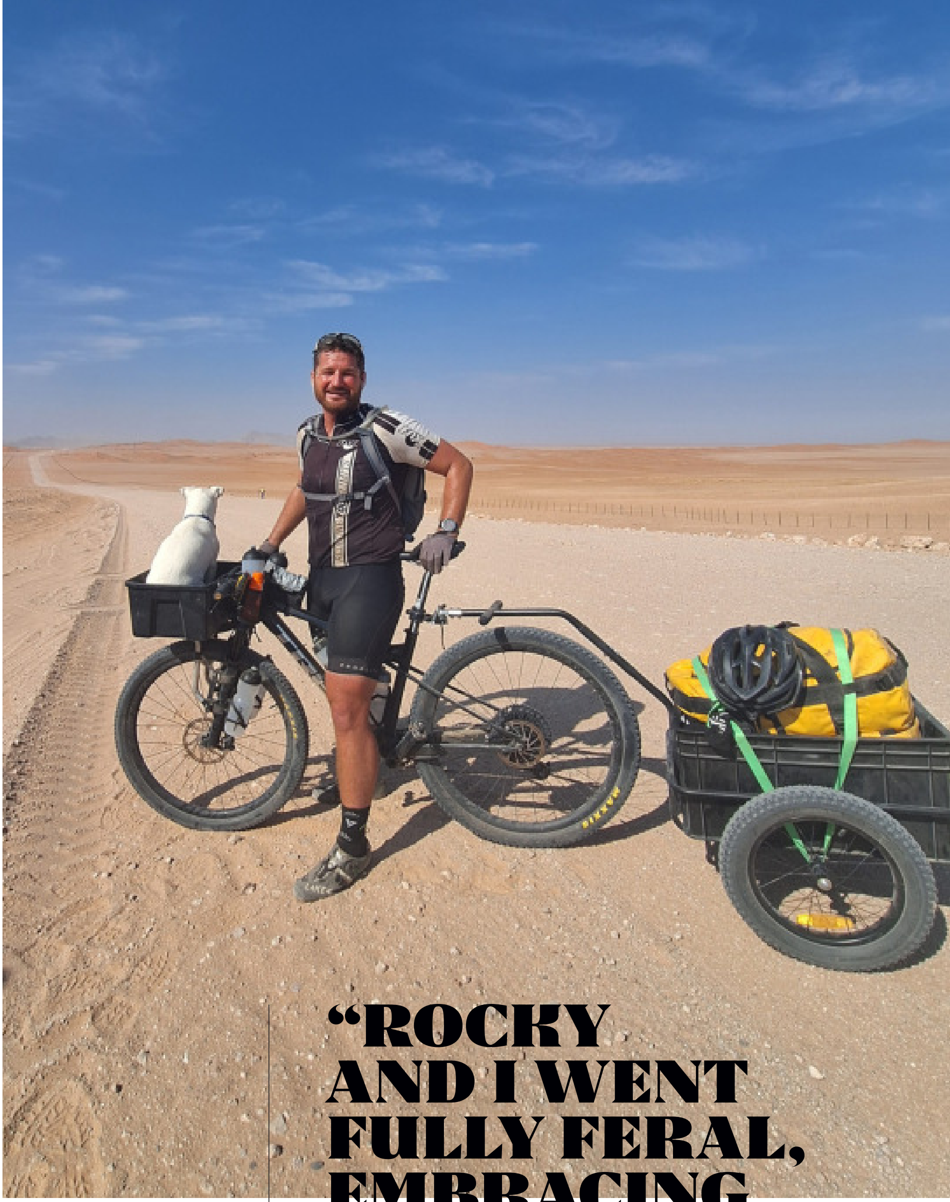
THE DESERT IS an unforgiving landscape that strips you down to your bare essentials and teaches you the meaning of resilience.

Riding through the Namib with my loyal Jack Russell Terrier, Rocky, I couldn't help but think of *The Sheltering Desert*, a 1957 memoir by the German geologist Henno Martin. His tale of survival and adaptation in the harsh Namibian wilderness echoed my own journey, offering an unexpected connection between my adventure now and his time hiding in the desert to avoid internment during World War II.

I dubbed our adventure "Rocky's Ride"—an unsupported 750-mile bikepacking trek from the Namibian coastal town of Swakopmund to the Namibia–South Africa border formed by the Orange River. I'd be following "Segment 4 – Namib" of the Southern Africa and Namibian Deserts (SAND) routes, which was pioneered by a bikepacking adventurer from South Africa, Johan Wahl, and is featured on bikepacking.com. I chose this route so I could immerse myself in the wilderness and truly experience the Namib. I'd be doing the route in reverse, north to south, while hoping to raise 50,000 South African rand ($2,800) for the Kloof & Highway SPCA outside Durban, South Africa.

My touring rig consisted of a two-wheeled trailer loaded with food, clothing, and survival gear attached to my Trek Supercaliber. Rocky rode up front in a plastic carrier mounted on the front fork. On smoother stretches, his carrier doubled as makeshift aero bars, and he'd rest his head on my arm. The conversations were mostly one-sided, but I kept talking anyway—rambling about the terrain, my aching legs, or whatever random thoughts crossed my mind, as if he understood every word.

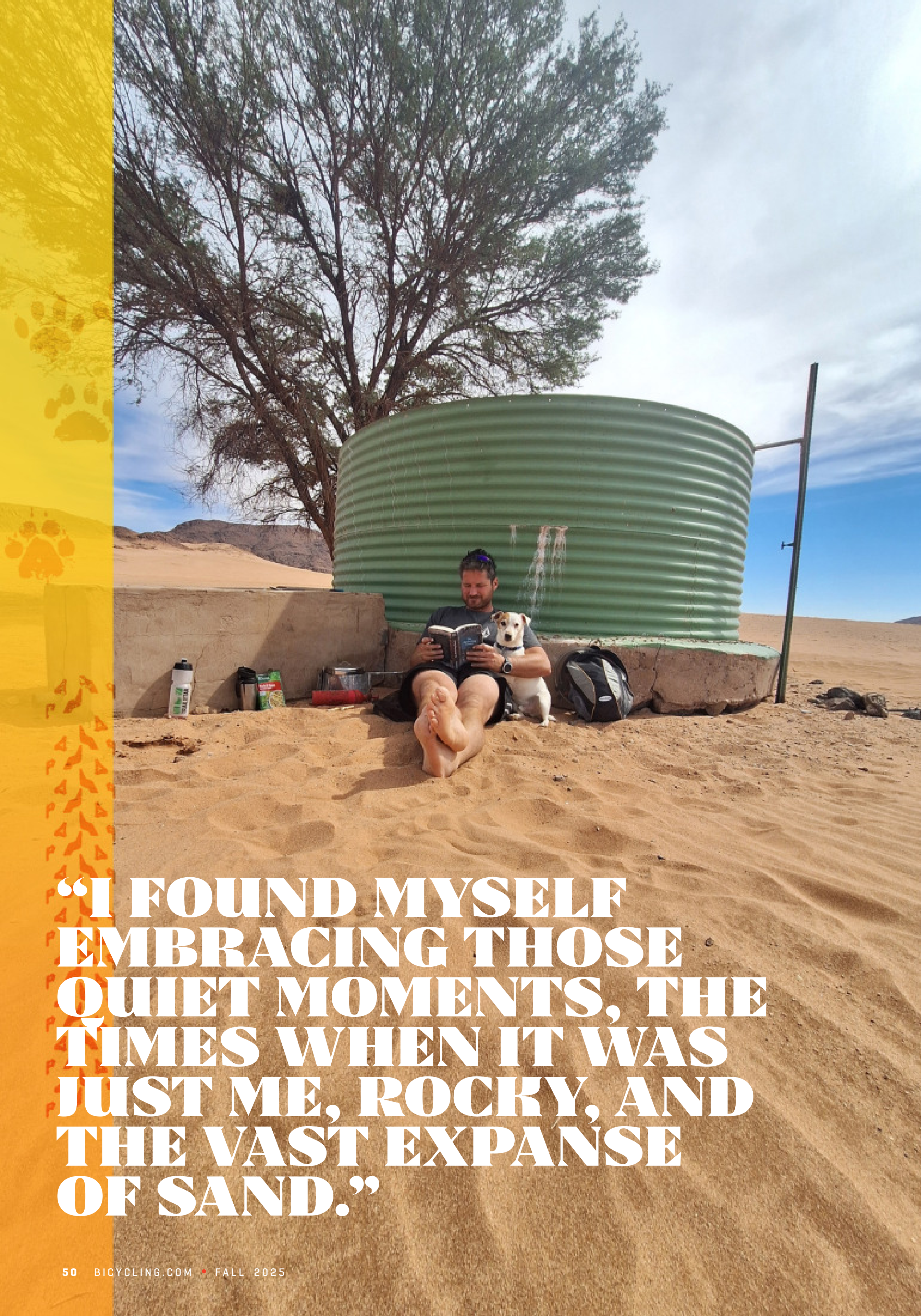
With minimal training squeezed in around my hectic schedule as an offshore diver, I set off full of high hopes. It didn't take long for reality to set in: The weight of my gear (and, let's be honest, my love handles) and the harsh terrain had me questioning my chances of completion more than once.



RAW BEAUTY AND RELENTLESS TRIALS / Temperatures in the desert fluctuate dramatically, especially during the winter months, when at night they can hover in the mid-40s and during the day often reach the high 70s. The terrain can be incredibly unforgiving, but the desert also rewards you with some of the most pristine landscapes imaginable. The endless white gravel roads—which left my eyes burning after several hours on the bike—and the relentless corrugations tested my endurance and my resolve.

"Adapt" became my mantra. I learned to camp wild, ration water, and navigate with apps like iOverlander. Every day was a juggling act: I needed to carry just enough supplies while avoiding feeling like I was towing a small house behind me.

> **"ROCKY AND I WENT FULLY FERAL, EMBRACING THE DESERT'S ISOLATION. I SET UP CAMP IN MY BIRTHDAY SUIT WHILE ROCKY ROLLED IN ANTELOPE DROPPINGS."**



“I FOUND MYSELF EMBRACING THOSE QUIET MOMENTS, THE TIMES WHEN IT WAS JUST ME, ROCKY, AND THE VAST EXPANSE OF SAND.”

On Day 3, leaving the Gobabeb Training & Research Centre—an isolated dot in the middle of the Namib-Naukluft National Park—I braced myself for some of the most desolate terrain I'd encounter on the whole route. A subtle 20-mile climb was made even more challenging by horrible gravel, a merciless headwind, and the scorching midday sun.

Fully loaded with dog, bike, water, and gear, my rig weighed a hefty 155 pounds. Add my 220-pound body weight, and you can imagine my painfully slow progress. I saw only one car that day, and I had to ration my water carefully. It took me 11 hours to ride 37 miles—one of the toughest days of the expedition.

But that night I camped wild for the first time, in a huddle of camelthorn trees beneath a blanket of stars. Rocky and I went fully feral, embracing the desert's isolation. I set up camp in my birthday suit while Rocky rolled in antelope droppings. I attempted to clean him with a wet wipe before he climbed into the tent with me, but I didn't smell much better than he did, to be honest. With water saving in effect, I was covered in thick sand, salt, and sweat.

After a week of gravel roads that seemed to go on forever, I reached Solitaire, an isolated desert stopover with lodging, a campground, a general store, and a bakery. Chocolate milkshakes and apple pie were the reward for my suffering.

I used the workshop in Solitaire to weld my spare trailer hitch back together after having already suffered one breakdown. It had happened on Day 4, about 20 miles into the Kuiseb River valley, on a short and fast downhill. The speed caused my trailer to fishtail and the hitch snapped under the strain, sending the trailer tumbling. Fortunately I was carrying a spare hitch so I could do some temporary repairs.

Although it wasn't a race, after some time I grew anxious about my progress. Rocky's paperwork was valid for only 30 days, so reentering South Africa, our home country, required careful timing. To travel to Namibia with a dog, you need a vaccination and health certificate endorsed by a state veterinarian, which must be presented at the border. If you stay longer than 30 days, you need new paperwork from a Namibian vet for reentry back into South Africa.

Setting up for the night by a cattle trough under a lone camelthorn tree—the only feature in a sea of sand.

THE NAMIB'S WILD MOOD SWINGS / Namibia is one of the least densely populated countries on earth. Wild camping in such a place means setting up in remote, untouched areas and being self-sufficient. On a bike tour, you become one with the desert—sand fills literally every crevice, and your salt-streaked clothes mark each hard-earned mile.

But cycling allows you to feel the rhythm of the land beneath you. Corrugations, hard-packed earth, sand—they each have their own mood. Some days the road fights you, forcing your legs to pump like pistons and your muscles to ache. On other days, with a tailwind, the ride becomes effortless, as if the desert is guiding you forward.

There's a certain peace that comes with being alone. After several days of riding, I found myself embracing the quiet moments, the times when it was just me, Rocky, and the vast expanse of sand. That's when the desert would morph from adversary to companion, silently pushing me to my limits while rewarding me with moments of profound gratitude.

Day 9 led me to a cattle trough under a lone camelthorn tree—the only feature in a sea of sand as far as the horizon in all directions. If I pressed down the float valve, I had fresh water on demand—the perfect spot to set up camp.

That night, reading *The Sheltering Desert* by the light of my headlamp, I felt an even deeper connection to its author. His survival story reminded me that the isolation I faced was a gift—an opportunity to reflect, slow down, and appreciate life stripped to its essentials.

CLOSE ENCOUNTERS WITH DESERT WILDLIFE / Warthogs, ostriches, zebras, giraffes, antelopes like gemsbok and springbok...These and many other animals crossed our path, sometimes too closely.

Rocky was in his element, darting after anything that moved. It was instinctual, primal—the kind of behavior you can't train out of a dog that has been bred for the chase. Hunting is in his DNA. His

> **“I LEARNED THAT SURVIVAL ISN’T JUST PHYSICAL; IT’S ABOUT MENTAL STRENGTH, AND FINDING JOY IN SMALL VICTORIES.”**

energy never waned, no matter how many times I called him back. The desert may have been testing me, but it was pure entertainment for Rocky.

On our evening in Solitaire, Rocky’s fussiness over food led to a little excitement. He’d ignored his pork chop, which was sitting barely six feet from our tent in his bowl. As I lay half asleep, I heard a noise—faint, but enough to pull me from my haze. Poking my head out, I caught a jackal in the act of running off with Rocky’s meal.

At the small settlement of Sesriem, we had another surprise guest. As I was eating a sandwich, a Cape fox crept into camp. Thankfully, Rocky was snoring away in the tent, oblivious. The fox was wary but curious, and I ended up sharing my sandwich with it: An unexpected moment of connection.

Not all encounters were so peaceful. Near Betta, three gemsbok appeared on the road ahead of us, caught on the wrong side of a game fence, a barrier designed to control the movement of wildlife. Every time I rode closer, they’d sprint a few hundred yards, then stop and wait for us to catch up. This game of tag went on for what felt like hours.

But things took a turn when a road grader approached us from the opposite direction. The antelope panicked and tried to clear the fence. Two made it over with ease, but the third got caught in the wire. I quickly tied Rocky to a fencepost so he wouldn’t get impaled on the long horns thrashing on the ground, and with the help of the grader crew, we freed the tangled buck. It lay there for a few tense moments, blood dripping from its mouth and from a gaping leg wound. I feared the worst, but one of the workers gave it a slap on the hindquarters and it scrambled upright and bolted, rejoining its companions.

As we made our way toward Barby Guest Farm near Helmeringhausen, two warthogs appeared, running parallel to the fence. I couldn’t resist trying to capture the moment on my phone while still pedaling—multitasking at its finest. But suddenly everything slowed as I caught sight of a white blur: Rocky had launched himself from his carrier like Superman!

The landing, however, was far from heroic, as Rocky tumbled backside over brains (or lack thereof). True to form, he bounced back up in one smooth motion and took off after the warthogs. I called out, worried that he might be hurt, but he soon returned, looking a little sheepish, with just a scrape on his chin.

MEDICAL MISHAPS AND MAKESHIFT FIXES / As I rode, through shifting sand and across rugged plains, I learned that survival isn’t just physical; it’s about mental strength and finding joy in small victories, like a refreshing breeze after hours of heat or a stunning sunset after a grueling day.

It’s about knowing your limits and pushing beyond them, trusting that in its own way, the desert will provide. But the days ahead promised more challenges, moments when I questioned my sanity, when my body screamed for rest, and when I wondered if I could actually keep going.

Rocky had his own battles—chiefly, tolerating my singing. I can carry a heavy load, but carrying

People often looked puzzled at first, but once they saw Rocky perched on the handlebar, smiles followed.

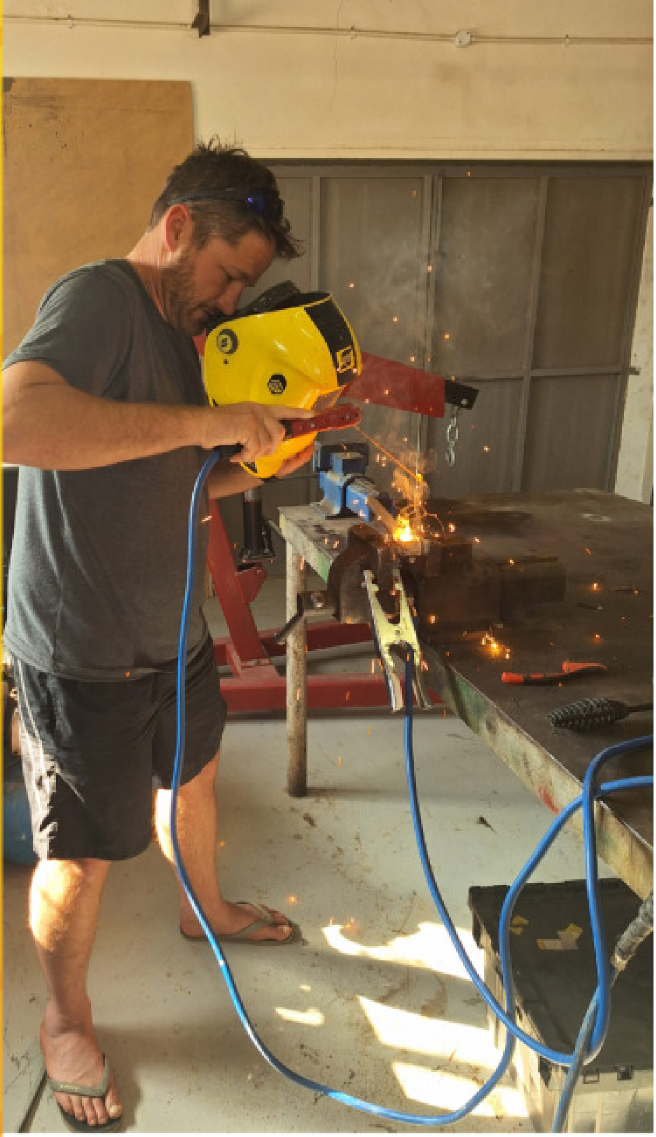
a tune? Not so much. As we rode, I'd sing along to my playlist, more to distract myself from the monotony of pedaling than anything else. I often tell my girlfriend, "Just because I can't sing doesn't mean I won't." Out there in the Namib, there were no other humans to suffer through my off-key performances.

Feeding Rocky was another issue. He's a notoriously picky eater, rejecting even the premium kibble I'd lugged along. Eventually I resorted to South African–style jerky like biltong and droëwors, and the occasional biscuit. While the high-protein diet kept him fueled, it also led to an unpleasant side effect: constipation. That was fine until nighttime, when we were confined to the tent, and his farting became unbearable.

Rocky's left eye, prone to sunburn, was another concern. I had prescription eye drops and tried to keep the eye protected by covering it with duct tape while he was in his carrier. He'd rip off the tape as soon as he got out, but for the hours he spent in the basket, his eye was shielded from the sun and dusty wind.

I had some medical mishaps of my own. While walking barefoot in the sand near that cattle trough on Day 9, I'd stepped on a piece of wire. What had started as a small injury became progressively worse. And as it was directly above my cleat, the pressure of pedaling started to get really uncomfortable.

In need of some medical attention and with no fancy tools on hand, I improvised. Using a large white spike from a camelthorn tree as my surgical instrument, I pierced my skin. Yellow pus erupted, instantly relieving some of the pressure. I prodded around to ensure that nothing was lodged inside and then applied antiseptic cream to reduce the infection.



Left: In Solitaire, the author had to put his welding skills to the test to fix his trailer hitch. Top Right: The desert is hard on a cycling kit. Bottom Right: Crossing the Namib wouldn't have been possible without the help of strangers.

THE VILLAGE IT TOOK TO CARRY US /

It quickly became clear that crossing the desert without the help of strangers would be impossible. My journey would have ended abruptly without people's generosity. Their encouragement filled me with gratitude.

As cars approached, people often looked puzzled at first, but once they got closer and saw Rocky perched on my handlebar, smiles and laughter followed. His presence brought joy to everyone we met.

I met several adventure cyclists along the way, including a father and son from France who were cycling from Luanda, Angola, to Cape Town, South Africa. We shared a hunting cabin and tackled a stretch of sand together. Yang, the son, swapped bikes with me for a short distance—his gravel bike struggled in the sand with its skinny tires, while my wider tires floated through like a camel across the Sahara. On hard terrain, though, their lighter bikes were far faster as they sped ahead with ease.

My path also crossed that of three Swiss cyclists riding from Cairo to Cape Town. They shared tales of their 7,500-mile journey—most of them positive, except for a moment at the Kenya/Ethiopia border when a group of kids swarmed around them and stripped them of their gear. Despite this, their enthusiasm remained undimmed.

Over dinner at Betta Lodge, between Sesriem and Aus, I struck up a conversation with a Norwegian woman, Liv, and her 74-year-old Australian husband, John, who was a geologist-turned-amateur artist. The next morning, after dropping off my trailer for yet more repairs, I joined John on an impromptu adventure so he could sketch the hills.

In search of some colorful terrain, we met Martin and Bettina Günther, owners of a roughly 14,000-acre hunting farm, who welcomed us with filter coffee. They also shared their conservation philosophy: Income from foreign hunters helps them preserve the land and wildlife in this remote part of Africa.

Martin was busy preparing a “spiked” meal for the local baboons. A troop had been monopolizing the food he left out for other wildlife during the drought, and to humanely deter them, he’d filled a one-and-a-half-gallon tub with mielies (corn) and oats, adding a hefty amount of local gin. His plan was to get the baboons drunk, hoping they’d experience a terrible hangover and avoid returning. When I followed up with Martin a few weeks later, it turned out the plan had worked; the baboons were keeping a healthy distance.

The Günthers’ hospitality extended to a game-viewing drive and a nature walk where we spotted wildlife and hiked to a dry waterfall that was once part of an ox wagon trail. Afterward, their dogs and Rocky cooled off in a cattle trough. It was a day filled with genuine Namibian hospitality.

THE TRUE REWARDS / Every day as I flagged down passing vehicles for water, people stopped to help without hesitation, filling my bottle with smiles, encouragement, and a kindness that left me overwhelmed. Their actions were a powerful reminder of the deep well of human goodness.

Nelson Mandela once said, “What counts in life is not the mere fact that we have lived. It is what difference we have made to the lives of others that will determine the significance of the life we lead.” Those words echoed through my mind for many miles as I realized just how significant acts of kindness had been during my own journey.

As Rocky and I approached the Vioolsdrift border post between Namibia and South Africa, a tangle of emotions took hold: relief, mingled with a quiet sense of accomplishment.

This was the conclusion of an extraordinary 23-day, 733-mile journey, but it wasn’t the end of the road. It wasn’t just about the distance covered or the obstacles overcome; it was about what the desert had taught me about resilience and purpose.

“THIS ISN’T A STORY ABOUT TRIUMPH IN THE CONVENTIONAL SENSE, OR A NEATLY WRAPPED CONCLUSION. IT’S AN INVITATION FOR EVERYONE TO CONTINUE EXPLORING.”

The money I raised for animal welfare was more than a statistic on a charity tracker, too: It symbolized hope and compassion. Each contribution was a reminder that even the smallest gestures can ripple outward, changing lives in ways we might never fully grasp.

I crossed the border feeling lighter—not just from the journey’s physical toll, but from the lessons learned: The solitude of the desert, the kindness of strangers, and the steady companionship of Rocky had become a mosaic of moments etched deep into my heart.

This isn’t a story about triumph in the conventional sense, or a neatly wrapped conclusion. It’s an invitation for everyone to continue exploring. Go and look for those quiet, uncharted corners of yourself; you’ll be surprised at what you find there. ***B***

Relive their adventure on Instagram: @rockysride.

WHY I RIDE WHEN THE WORLD IS SLEEPING

In the dark, I learned to sit in silence, transfixed by nature and memory.

by
REGINALD DWAYNE BETTS

photography by
JAROD LEW

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THE CICADAS, CRICKETS, little owls, and even the rustling of leaves turned the night into a chorus accompanying my churning legs. I pedaled, angry and weeping, in the dark. I'd gotten married to the first woman I dated out of prison. Two sons and 15 years later, our marriage had been rockier for longer than it had been stable. I didn't know that divorce would soon make me a single father but knew that whatever dam had kept me from weeping had broken. I was 42 years old and hadn't felt this alone since I'd been in solitary confinement.

On a borrowed bike with a borrowed helmet on a road lit only by the moon, I pedaled faster than I should have, two miles down a winding road in Italy's Umbrian countryside. I'd received a 2023 Civitella Fellowship and was invited to Italy, along with about a dozen others—painters, photographers, musicians, historians, and two poets fleeing the war in Ukraine—for a six-week residency in a circa-15th-century castle. My family was staying in a villa two miles away. Twice a day I drove to see them, and twice a day I returned to work in a castle that felt as fanciful as the giants that Don Quixote made windmills out to be. I didn't know that in less than two years I'd be diagnosed with ADHD and bipolar disorder. I did not yet have a name for the unbearable sadness I felt. But I knew something inside me was turning my waking days into a losing battle against tears.

▶ The author near his home in Connecticut, July 12, 2025.

I was further away from prison than I'd ever been, finding solace in the discovery of cycling, being reminded what it means to keep going when the world around you becomes barely noticeable. I'd never seriously ridden a bike, and that night and many nights after, having a pair of tires spin under me, again and again, kept me tethered to my mind.

My oldest son, Micah, was 15 that summer, and one afternoon I convinced him to bike three miles with me to an abandoned church I'd found on a walk a few days earlier. When I'd first approached it, the collection of boarded and shattered windows awakened with hundreds of black birds lifting into the sky at once. I thought of Hitchcock and the last movie to truly frighten me. I wanted to share that sense of fear and spectacle with Micah, even though he didn't like birds and even though I didn't like being afraid. When he agreed to the ride, as often happened those days, I nearly wept. We arrived and a small dog ran up to us and stopped like a canine Gandalf barking *You shall not pass*. That's when I noticed the no trespassing signs and realized the land belonged to someone.

The uphill ride back to the castle proved far more challenging than the downhill sprint. Every few minutes I'd stop and pause. "You okay?" Micah had asked. I was such an inexperienced rider that I'd brought neither water nor snacks, despite expecting the fierce Italian sun. I'd stop and pause again, and again Micah would ask if I was okay. Each time I'd say yes, knowing the ride was more than my body could stand, knowing what was hurting me was far more than this short bicycle ride.

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I WENT TO prison when I was 16 for carjacking a man at gunpoint. For years, a point of pride for me was that I'd only cried twice while I was inside. The first time was on December 9, 1996, the day after my arrest, when I learned I would miss Christmas. The second time was a year later, lying on my prison bunk listening to a story of the Civil Rights Movement on the holiday for

MAJOR TAYLOR
BLACK WALL ST
RIDE TO REMEMBER
TULSA-OK to WALL ST

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▲ Betts relies on lights and reflective gear for his night rides.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. I felt I'd wasted my life, ashamed to be in prison and ashamed of my own violence that got me there, especially as I juxtaposed it with the nonviolence at the center of the bus boycotts and marches. For the next seven years I never wept again. Then I came home and didn't weep at my wedding. Never wept at a funeral, at any of my college graduations, at the birth of either of my sons.

At the castle, each fellow was expected to present their work. I decided to read new poems, some of which would appear in my latest collection, *Doggerel*. For the first time, my words leaned toward something other than prison and sorrow, toward a mixture of hope and attention to what was good in my life. This turn had come after a friend, Amy Low, had told me she had colon cancer. It doesn't make sense. Amy and I were not close. She ran a fellowship program at Emerson Collective where I had been a fellow and she knew me far better than I knew her. I overshare. I often talk to strangers as if fate has made us cellmates and circumstance guarantees we'll reveal our lives to each other as a way to cope with our fragility. When she told me she had cancer, I was reminded of what it meant to be vulnerable to someone who barely knows you. And I was reminded of how I had once failed a childhood friend who'd told me she had breast cancer, and I never called to check on her. So I offered Amy a poem for each time she went to chemo. Those poems were about flowers and dogs and the best parts of even the worst moments of my days in ways that nothing I'd written had ever been. I never expected the poems to make it

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> I’D LEAVE SO EARLY THAT THE MORNING SKY WAS STILL BLACK AND FILLED WITH RACCOONS AND FOXES MYSTERIOUS ENOUGH TO FRIGHTEN ME.

into a book and never expected to read them aloud. But I was reeling in Italy, already weeping most days because of something I’d yet to identify as depression.

I thought reading the happy poems would steady me, but I could not get through a single line without weeping. The audience, at least to me, seemed uncomfortable with my tears. No one approached me or asked if I was alright. I felt utterly alone. Then during the Q and A, my favorite part of any reading, I got only one question. “Dad, you use that word ‘juxtapose’ a lot. What does it mean?” asked my youngest son, Miles, who was 11 at the time.

I told Miles that to juxtapose is to lay two things side by side. I couldn’t understand it then, but I’d been compartmentalizing my life. It might have kept me from weeping, but it also kept me from the sense of self that I’d begun to approach when someone slipped Dudley Randall’s *The Black Poets* under my cell door in the hole. Maybe it was poetry in prison that had allowed me to weep without weeping. Now it was poems for Amy that allowed my weeping to return.

When I went to prison in 1996, I didn’t own a bike. And unexpectedly, in Italy, for the first time since my release on March 4, 2005, a bike was returning me to what prison had once given: near limitless time with my mind.

After returning from Italy to my home in Connecticut, I dusted off a flat-bar Trek I’d purchased a while back. I didn’t know much about riding and had little time to go out on the road during the day. I’d leave so early that the morning sky was still black and filled with raccoons and foxes mysterious enough to frighten me. I took it as a challenge,

▲ Betts pauses on one of his night-time routes.

wondering when fear would make me turn around. I explained to my sons how the darkness made the familiar radically less so, and how knowing I mostly needed to make three right turns to get home, I would bike until fear made me turn right. Getting home was the reward.

One day in October, Miles called me at 3 a.m. as I prepared to go out for my ride. His bedroom was above the garage I would exit from, and each morning I must have been waking him up. He said, “Dad, it’s still dark. Maybe you shouldn’t go out.” I was already dressed and had on a helmet, though I’d not yet gotten lights. “What if I came with you?” he said. He still wasn’t but 11 and afraid of that kind of quiet dark.

“How about you let me take this ride alone,” I said. “It’s too dark for me to look out for deer and you.” Then I told him how I’d once heard Kobe Bryant explain that he began waking earlier to get another practice in. How weeks and months later all those practices became hours of work that his competitors couldn't touch. My son loves hoops, and I told him that being out there so early meant I could get miles in and still work a full day. I didn't tell him I was spending huge chunks of my days struggling to pull things together. Didn't explain how those mornings on the bike let me weep without fear of someone noticing.

A few weeks later, on my 43rd birthday, I startled Miles as I prepared to go for a ride. I thought he'd dozed off while watching television on the sofa, and so I'd paused to drape his body in a blanket. "No, Dad, have you gone on your ride?" I told him no and asked why. "Good, I just wanted to tell you happy birthday before you went out." I think about him and Micah often on my bike rides. I've come to realize that I'm never alone. I might not know what it means for my sons to see their father weep, but I know what it means to have been saved by them.

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IN PRISON, I would get up before the chirping birds. I would do pushups, 30 and 40 at a time. Now through the sheer spinning of wheels, I was on the way to losing 60 pounds, and my body was returning to what it looked like when I left prison 19 years earlier. I knew I was hooked one morning when it rained. I started to turn back. I wore my favorite pair of raw denim jeans, a large mud-colored hoodie, no gloves. But I didn't turn around; instead, I logged my first 20-mile ride, returning home in drenched denim.

When I made it to the bike shop, wondering how people biked in the rain, explaining how I'd done 20 in a downpour at 3 a.m., the tall brown-skin brother asked if I was training for the Olympics. I knew nothing of shoes that clipped to pedals, lobster gloves, or thin biking pants that kept you dry. Some days it felt like all I'd layered my life with was sorrow. I left the store with a lighter pocket but enough to go out into the night as if I had some sense, though to be honest it would be many months before I didn't put a pair of jeans over my biking tights.

I never thought that a bicycle would give me so much. I was learning to breathe and to sit in silence. Some days I felt my world had become bombarded with my own voice—I could neither hear nor listen to myself clearly. I never imagined that I could sit for hours on a road bike, transfixed by nature and memory.

Once, I got a flat tire while trying to bike 50 miles. A stranger on his own bike stopped and commiserated with me. Asked me if I had a spare. (I did not.) Suggested I grab one and learn how to change it in a pinch. Told me he'd had a few. And I was reminded what it means to have others come offer support that I was unwilling to request. For months I biked at night without a helmet or lights until friends mailed me what I needed to keep me safe. I was uncertain if climbing onto the saddle each morning made sense until my youngest stayed up all night to tell me to have a good ride on my birthday.

And then there was the time, riding on the highway at 5 a.m., when sirens startled me. I'd been rereading *I Am the Cheese*, a book we'd read when I was in the 7th or 8th grade. There's a scene where the main character is riding down a highway from Massachusetts to Vermont where he hopes to find his father. One morning, a wrong turn took me farther from home than I wanted to be. Thinking of the book, I jumped on the highway to get back faster. I first knew this was a mistake when the rush of an 18-wheeler and its horn had me teetering. The sirens behind me only confirmed it. I'd just begun wearing the shoes that clip onto pedals, and I tumbled over as I attempted to stop. Wildly, I was not afraid of the officer—despite knowing he'd believe me drunk. And he laughed incredulously as I explained the book. I could tell, as he requested my license, that he wanted to ask me if I believed everything that I read in books. I laughed. Imagine being me, a survivor of solitary confinement and my own stupidity, having a police officer light his sirens to escort me back to a safe road.

One day soon, I'll get on my bike and will keep pedaling until I hit 100 miles. As a kid in prison, I met men serving a century.

Maybe what I mean is that I know I've been lost before. I never expected to find myself on a bike, riding, no matter what direction I pedaled, toward a future where I know I'm loved. ***B***

Reginald Dwayne Betts is a poet and a lawyer, and founder of Freedom Reads, a nonprofit that works to transform access to literature in prisons.

▶ Betts at the Old Center Cemetery in North Haven, Conn.

The peloton descends one of the opening gravel sections in the Strade Bianche. Not even 20 years old, the springtime race is considered by many to be one of cycling's Monuments.

THE *Italian* RENAISSANCE

PEOPLE KEEP SAYING ITALIAN CYCLING ISN'T WHAT IT USED TO BE. THAT'S ACTUALLY NOT A BAD THING.

WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY JAMES STARTT

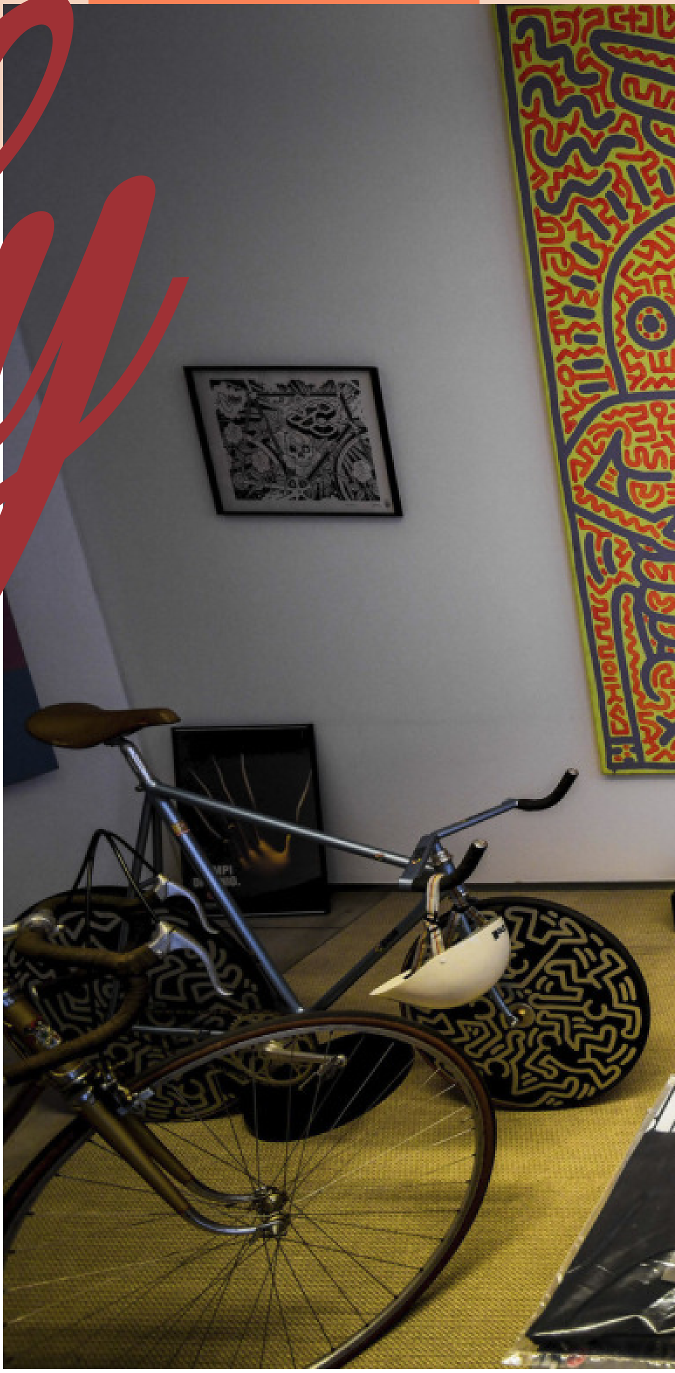
Italy

calls itself the *Bel Paese*, the beautiful country. And few would argue. It's a title earned not just through a rich cultural history, but through the everyday poetry of the place: terraced olive orchards, cypress-lined roads meandering past vineyards, the quiet hum of life in medieval villages untouched by time. For cyclists, it's where landscape, style, and soul converge, where a bicycle ride becomes more than motion and something closer to art.

"Italy is the best place in the world to ride bikes," says Pier Bergonzi, editor of *Sportweek*, the weekly magazine of *La Gazzetta dello Sport*. "There are big climbs everywhere. From Sicily to Sardinia to Puglia, everywhere you go, you can find amazing roads to ride."

Beyond the landscape and terrain, Italy has long been one of the sport's spiritual homes. Historic races like Milan–San Remo, Il Lombardia, and the Giro d'Italia have provided iconic backdrops to countless rivalries and exploits, while Italian bikes and equipment were long considered the pinnacle of cycling performance and design. Put simply, Italian cycling has shaped the sport as we know it.

But what about now? Italy no longer boasts a single men's team at the sport's highest level, the World Tour. Its last men's Grand Tour winner, Vincenzo Nibali, retired in 2022. Meanwhile, iconic Italian brands like Campagnolo struggle to compete alongside rivals like SRAM and Shimano. It would be easy to assume the heartland of cycling is little more than a shell of its former self. But is this truly a downswing, or is it the beginning of a reinvention?



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IN THE EARLY MORNING of May 13, 1909, 127 riders took off from Milan's Piazzale Loreto, kicking off the first edition of the Giro d'Italia. Inspired by the Tour de France, the Italian sports daily *La Gazzetta dello Sport* launched Italy's inaugural Grand Tour, just six years after the first edition of the French race.

Antonio Colombo, in his Milan office in 2019, pushed the link between artistic freedom and bicycle design. He purchased this Keith Haring painting after the artist's first show in Milan in 1984.

The early years were very much an Italian affair, with riders like Costante Girardengo and Alfredo Binda winning numerous editions and inspiring fans around the country. Binda won the race five times between 1925 and 1935, setting a record that was eventually matched but has never been surpassed.

Nothing, however, brought Italian cycling fans together as much as the legendary rivalry between Gino Bartali and Fausto Coppi, two of the sport's all-time greatest champions, with eight wins between them from 1936 to 1953. On paper, they could not have been more different. Bartali embodied the devout Catholic from the heart of the country, while Coppi represented the more modern industrial north. Fans were divided; one could not be both a Bartali and a Coppi supporter.

It was only as their rivalry began to wane that

103
Giro d'Italia

Top: Sicily, with its muscular and layered hills, is a prime example of Italy's geographic diversity. The country's terrain along with its iconic scenery is what makes riding there so satisfying. Bottom: During a stage of the 2020 Giro d'Italia, fans anticipate the arrival of the peloton.

the Giro's international profile started to grow, and in 1950, the race saw its first non-Italian winner, Swiss rider Hugo Koblet. One of the sport's most elegant but also ephemeral champions, Koblet would go on to win the Tour de France in 1951, beginning a pattern wherein victory in the Giro became a rite of passage for cycling's international stars. (All the five-time Tour de France winners—Jacques Anquetil, Eddy Merckx, Bernard Hinault, and Miguel Induráin—also won the Giro.)

Today, as millions around the world watch the Giro d'Italia, Italian racing is in the midst of an identity crisis. Although Elisa Longo Borghini became the first Italian to win the women's Giro d'Italia in 2024 and defended her title in 2025, it has been nearly 10 years since an Italian won the men's race. And there are no apparent candidates in the near future.

"We are going through one of the worst periods in the history of Italian cycling," says Bergonzi. "Twenty or thirty years ago, cycling was 'old Europe.' Now there are new riders from Australia, the U.S., the U.K., South America," Bergonzi says. And in this broader field, Italy appears to be playing catch-up.

There are still Italian standouts, of course. Jonathan Milan is emerging as a top sprinter. Filippo Ganna is a world champion time trialist and Olympic gold medalist. "He is good in the classics and maybe he can win a Milan–San Remo or Paris–Roubaix," Bergonzi says. "But he can't win a big stage race. So we wait."

Nibali, who won all three Grand Tours during his career, agrees. Italy has good riders, but fewer of them, he says. He believes the vacuum lies in the fact that the country no longer has a World Tour team—a pathway that aspiring riders can aim for. But to create a World Tour team requires a huge investment, he says. You need at least three years of development and €90 million to €100 million over five years. And unless you have a megastar like Tadej Pogačar or Jonas Vingegaard, you won't get visibility to match the cost.

It's not that Italy has lost the know-how, says Bergonzi. "We have the sports directors, the

FROM SICILY TO SARDINIA TO PUGLIA, EVERYWHERE YOU GO, YOU CAN FIND AMAZING ROADS TO RIDE.

technicians, the mechanics, the soigneurs. All the big teams in the world have Italian staff," he says. But without an Italian World Tour team, all that knowledge, forged from generations of experience, will be forever dispersed elsewhere.

Fabio Aru, the 2015 Vuelta a España winner and stage winner in the Tour de France and Giro d'Italia, echoes these concerns. But he believes the sport needs to grow from the ground up, that it needs more development teams for riders as young as 10 or 11. Aru grew up in Sardinia and moved to northern Italy (as did Nibali) to pursue his career. Back then, Tuscany was thriving with youth-development programs. "Today a lot of young teams have closed," says Aru, who retired in 2021. In response, he founded the Fabio Aru Academy in Sardinia in 2023, for kids ages 6 to 17 to train and race. "If every former pro...did something for the young generation," he says, "it would be a real [investment] for the future."

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DESPITE THE ELITE racing vacuum, Italy still hosts some of the sport's crown-jewel events. The Giro d'Italia remains a cultural touchstone. It unites Italy, race director Mauro Vegni told me in 2020. "Italy was a country unified by war [the Wars of Unification in the mid-19th century]. But the Giro is part of everyone's heritage, from the north to the south." (The official race road book is even called *Il Garibaldi*, named after Giuseppe Garibaldi, a central figure in the unification.)

One of the strengths of Italian cycling today, says Bergonzi, is the country's ability to create and scale new events. RCS Sports & Events, the organizer of Italy's most high-profile historic races, including the Giro, has a track record for innovation. The most significant example is the Strade Bianche.

Launched in 2007, this Spring Classic quickly became one of the sport's most anticipated races. Today we almost take it for granted, but in a sport so bound by tradition, the creation of a new modern-day classic at the dawn of the 21st century is almost unfathomable. However, the race organizers created something both firmly entrenched in history and attractive to today's top riders, a race that has proven itself to be as timely as it is timeless.

Held in early March, the course traverses the iconic white gravel roads of Tuscany before finishing on the Piazza del Campo in the heart of Siena. It is one of the most picturesque events on the calendar. And because the white roads are not as brutal as, say, the cobblestones of Paris–Roubaix, the course attracts climbers, puncheurs, and classics specialists alike. Its list of recent winners—from Wout van Aert and Julian Alaphilippe, to Mathieu van der Poel and Tadej Pogačar—would be the envy of any race organizer. Meanwhile the creation of the Women's Strade Bianche in 2015, which races over the same roads on the same day and finishes just hours before the men, also proved an instant success. "Strade Bianche is maybe the best news for Italian racing in the last 20 years," Bergonzi says.

Italy has also led the way in elevating women's racing. For years, the Giro d'Italia was the most significant women's race in the world, and its success helped lay the groundwork for the return of a women's Tour de France in 2022. And beyond pro racing, gran fondo events like the Maratona dles Dolomites continue to thrive. "It's like the New York City Marathon for cyclists," Bergonzi says. "Every year, 40,000 people try to get one of the 9,000 spots."

INNOVATION IS ALSO at the heart of the Italian cycling industry's evolution, which, thanks to some savvy new brands that combine craftsmanship with cutting-edge tech, looks to be surviving the onslaught of international competition better than the current crop of professional road racers.

For generations, Italian bikes and equipment were synonymous with performance and artistry. Brands like Colnago, Pinarello, and Campagnolo were objects of lust for cycling purists. Sure, other countries produced high-quality products, but they rarely matched Italy's obsession with design and finish.

Few individuals embody Italian artistry more than Antonio Colombo, the longtime owner of Cinelli Bicycles. The son of Angelo Luigi Colombo, founder of Colombus steel tubes, Antonio acquired Cinelli Bicycles in 1978 and expanded the use of Colombus tubes around the world. But Colombo is also passionate about art and sees the bicycle not only as a tool for performance but also an extension of creative expression.

"Freedom is the territory of art and the territory of the bicycle," Colombo says. "You can interpret [it] in many, many ways." Cinelli's Laser track bike was likely the first sloped-tube pursuit bike, using a 24-inch front wheel and 26-inch rear wheel. An avid art collector, Colombo arranged for Keith Haring to hand-paint one of his own Laser bikes.

While Colombo says brands like Colnago and Pinarello approached bike design from more of a performance perspective, he believes all three arrived in a similar place: "In Italy there is a real obsession with craftsmanship," he says.

Today many of these family-owned businesses have changed hands. Ernesto Colnago sold his company in 2020; Colombo sold his in 2021; and

The peloton rolls out of the historic city of Matera to begin Stage 7 of the Giro d'Italia on October 9, 2020. The stage finished in the southeastern coastal city of Brindisi.

IN ITALY THERE IS A REAL OBSESSION WITH CRAFTSMANSHIP.

Fausto Pinarello sold the brand in 2023, although he remains involved. But the legacies endure. Since 2012, Colnago and Pinarello bikes have carried riders to a combined 11 Tour de France titles.

The most conspicuous industry exception is Campagnolo. Once the undisputed leader in componentry, and romanticized by diehard collectors, the company has struggled "to adapt to an increasingly fragmented and demanding bicycle market," wrote *Bicycling*'s Matt Phillips last year. "It was slow to provide more gearing options and shorter crank lengths, and it took Campy until [2024] to offer a power meter crank." When Campagnolo finally launched a gravel group in 2020, it was mechanical but cost as much as some electronic groups. While the company failed to sponsor a World Tour team in 2024, a 2025 deal with French team Cofidis may mark the beginning of a return.

Tom Pidcock
Q36.5
UCI PRO TEAM
UBS
SCOTT
SRAM

At the same time, Italy's next generation of brands is thriving. Kask, which produces helmets at its factory in northern Italy, is proving that world-class safety equipment doesn't have to sacrifice style. Nimbl is reshaping the cycling shoe market with models that combine stiffness and comfort with ultra-light designs.

And then there's Q36.5, one of the most unlikely success stories in cycling apparel. Founded in 2013 by Luigi Bergamo, formerly of Swiss clothing company Assos, Q36.5 entered the market at a time when fashion-minded brands were gaining a toehold. But Bergamo did not focus on aesthetics, instead building the brand around thermoregulation and performance. The name itself references the ideal core body temperature: 36.5 degrees Celsius. "My desire was to bring something totally new to the market," Bergamo says.

The company relies entirely on Italian products and craftsmanship, all sourced within 200 miles of its headquarters in the heart of the Dolomites. Each piece of clothing uses a mix of technical fabrics designed for specific functions: aerodynamics, breathability, or insulation.

The brand's rise over the past decade has been as improbable as it has been impressive. And its function-first philosophy has carved out a loyal customer base. Vincenzo Nibali is a consultant, and its Swiss-registered Pro Tour team—led by Tom Pidcock—acts as a rolling test lab.

"Our artisan situation is very strong. For handlebars, for saddles, for shoes, you name it," Pier Bergonzi says. "We have tradition, we have know-how, and we have passion. Mike Sinyard [of Specialized] once told me, 'People love good stuff. And here in Italy you have good stuff.'"

≈

ITALY MAY NO LONGER dominate in all the ways it once did, but its pull remains undeniably magnetic. The country's artistry, its terrain, its passion still define what so many of us love about riding.

Matera, home to a UNESCO World Heritage site, is one of the world's oldest continually inhabited cities; generations of civilizations have built over the earliest cave dwellings. Opposite: Several of Tom Pidcock's team jerseys in the Q36.5 factory.

Even if the World Tour is thinner on Italian stars, many fans hope a new generation of *campionissimi*, or champions, will arise. "Take tennis," Bergonzi says. "We had Adriano Panatta in the '70s, who won the French Open. Then [nothing] for 40 years, nobody in the top 10. Now we have Jannik Sinner, who is number one, and Lorenzo Musetti in the top 10." So perhaps Italy's next wave of Grand Tour contenders is coming.

But even as we wait, Italy continues to offer something rarer than race wins: soul. The aroma of espresso drifting across a piazza, the shimmer of heat on a Tuscan climb, the sound of tires humming through a medieval village—cycling in Italy isn't just about speed or stats. It's about rhythm, ritual, and beauty. The sport is embedded in the landscape, woven into daily life, forged into the artisanship. And maybe for that reason alone Italy will never lose its status as cycling's true heartland. ***B***

BIKE TUBES— YES, BIKE TUBES—

HAVE ENTERED THE CHAT

RAISE A HAND FOR THE HUMBLE UPGRADE THAT WILL TRANSFORM EVERY RIDE.

BY DAN CHABANOV

PHOTOGRAPHY BY TREVOR RAAB

Walk into a typical bike shop and ask which upgrade will boost the performance of your bike, and an employee likely will suggest a new wheelset. Lighter wheels will definitely liven up your ride, but they are not cheap. If you've entered a really good shop, an employee could suggest replacing the heavy tires with something lighter and more supple—a more economical option.

The "best bang for your buck" answer, though, is to upgrade your inner tubes. New wheels might set you back $1,000 or more. A set of good tires can easily cost $200 now. But a high-end pair of inner tubes runs about $40 to $50 and can deliver as much of a performance gain as those premium tires.

I'm not talking about the thick, heavy butyl tubes we're all familiar with. The biggest benefits come from tubes made from latex and—more recently—thermoplastic polyurethane (or TPU). The ultralight and highly packable TPU tubes are the latest innovation in tire-inflation technology; they offer close to the same rolling resistance performance as latex tubes but at roughly half the weight. They're so good in some cases that I'm running tubes—and not tubeless—in most of my road wheels. That's a pretty seismic change for me and other cyclists I know.

Since the advent of road tubeless tires and their widespread adoption in professional road racing several years ago, they have been the primary option for racing tire setups—they had lower rolling resistance than tires with butyl tubes and offered greater puncture resistance.

But in the last few years, the humble inner tube has come roaring back, at least on the road. (When it comes to gravel and trail riding, tubeless tires are here to stay.) In many cases, they offer more benefits and less hassle than road tubeless setups. Even some pro teams have swapped back to tubes.

The change didn't happen quickly. Early versions of TPU tubes used plastic valve stems, which were unreliable simply due to their fragility. Most TPU tubes now use alloy valve stems and, in my experience, have been as reliable as any other tube. Their only real downside is their price. Depending on their brand, they can sometimes be triple the price of a butyl inner tube. But the performance gains you get make them a great value compared to other upgrades, and as more options become available, prices have started to come down as well.

LIGHTER AND QUICKER

→ There are two main ways that latex or TPU tubes improve performance. The simplest is that they are lighter. A typical butyl inner tube weighs around 100 grams, depending on the specific size and valve. A latex inner tube is about 70 grams, saving 60 grams of rotational weight between both wheels. A TPU tube can be even lighter. The Tubolito S-Tubo tube comes in at just 22 grams. That's nearly one-fifth the weight of a butyl tube.

Saving 100 or 150 grams is substantial, given the seriously low cost. Jumping up from a Shimano 105 crankset to the brand's Dura-Ace R9200 would save about 82 grams while costing you a whopping $725. Plus, with tubes, you're reducing rotating weight, which has an even greater impact on how the bike feels and performs than cutting weight elsewhere.

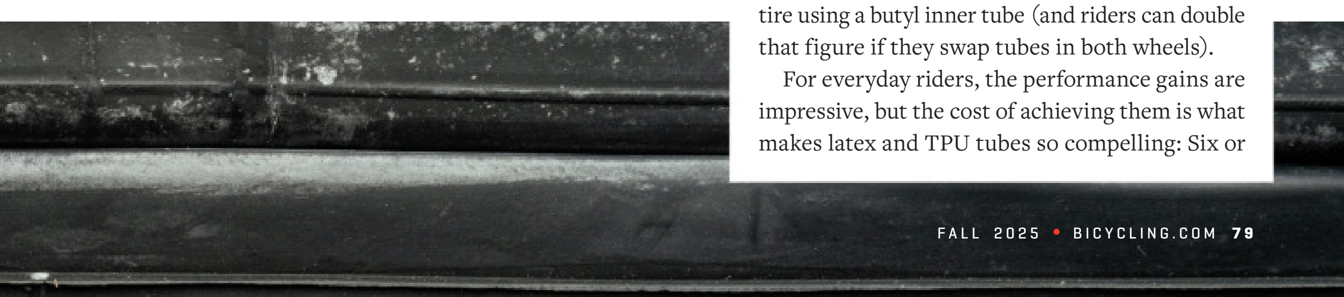
The more complex and impactful way latex and TPU tubes improve performance is by lowering the bike's rolling resistance (see "How to Deter-

▲ For decades, tire developers considered only how a tire spun across smooth surfaces to determine its optimal pressure. With better understanding of how wheels roll over rough roads, that calculus is changing.

mine the Perfect Tire Pressure," page 85). That's because they are made from thinner and more flexible material than butyl tubes, which allows them to better deform to road imperfections and give up less energy. This means that with constant effort from the rider, a bike with tubes made from these materials will roll faster than one with standard butyl inner tubes. In some cases, newer latex and TPU tubes create less rolling resistance than tubeless setups. Soudal Quick-Step and Red Bull–BORA–hansgrohe, two teams sponsored by Specialized, routinely race on cotton clincher tires with latex inner tubes because it can be a faster setup that helps them win races.

How much faster? The answer will depend greatly on the tube. Independent tire-testing outfit Bicycle Rolling Resistance recently evaluated different tube materials as well as a tubeless setup using a Continental GP5000 S TR tire to determine which had the least resistance. It found that latex and TPU tubes could save between 3 and 3.5 watts per tire (riding 18 mph at 60 psi) compared with the same tire using a butyl inner tube (and riders can double that figure if they swap tubes in both wheels).

For everyday riders, the performance gains are impressive, but the cost of achieving them is what makes latex and TPU tubes so compelling: Six or



seven watts can be the claimed aero benefits of a multi-thousand-dollar frame or wheelset. Obviously, a new set of inner tubes does not elicit the same kind of new-bike- or new-wheel-day feel, but if tangible performance gains are what you're after and you have only $50 to spend, a better set of tubes is the way to go.

BUT DON'T TUBES FLAT?

→ A lingering criticism of tubes of any sort is that they're more susceptible to flatting than tubeless setups. For riders who prioritize flat prevention above all else, a well-maintained tubeless setup is still the way to go. But newer, wider rims and tires are reducing pinch flats and small punctures. And when flats do happen, I can fix them faster when running tubes.

But for me, the biggest argument against road tubeless is the mess all that goopy sealant can create when you do flat and the extra maintenance that the system requires. Tubeless tires need sealant to maintain their airtightness and provide flat-prevention benefits. But that sealant could be drying up inside your tires as often as every three months.

Maintaining it properly involves removing your tire, wiping away clumps of dried sealant, and adding a fresh dose. I don't want to do that every three months, and most riders don't. Even if you skip cleaning out your tire and just add fresh sealant, it can still be a messy chore. That's just one bike; many of us have more than that in our garage.

On the other hand, wheels set up with an inner tube can sit for extended periods and require nothing more than a quick top-up of air to be ride-ready. Not to mention that if you get a tubeless flat out on the road that sealant can't fix, you'll still have to use a tube. Speaking from experience, putting a tube into a sealant-soaked tire is not a pleasant or clean experience.

This is why most of my road wheels are set up with TPU tubes these days. They roll fast, they're light, and I can fix a flat or change a whole tire in about 90 seconds. If I'm quick and everything works as intended (a big if), cleaning out tires and adding new sealant to a wheelset takes me about 20 minutes. Doing that twice per year is the equivalent of me changing more than 26 tubes. At this point, modern tubes and tires are great, and I'd rather spend my time riding than maintaining sealant.

FIVE TIRE TOOLS I TRUST

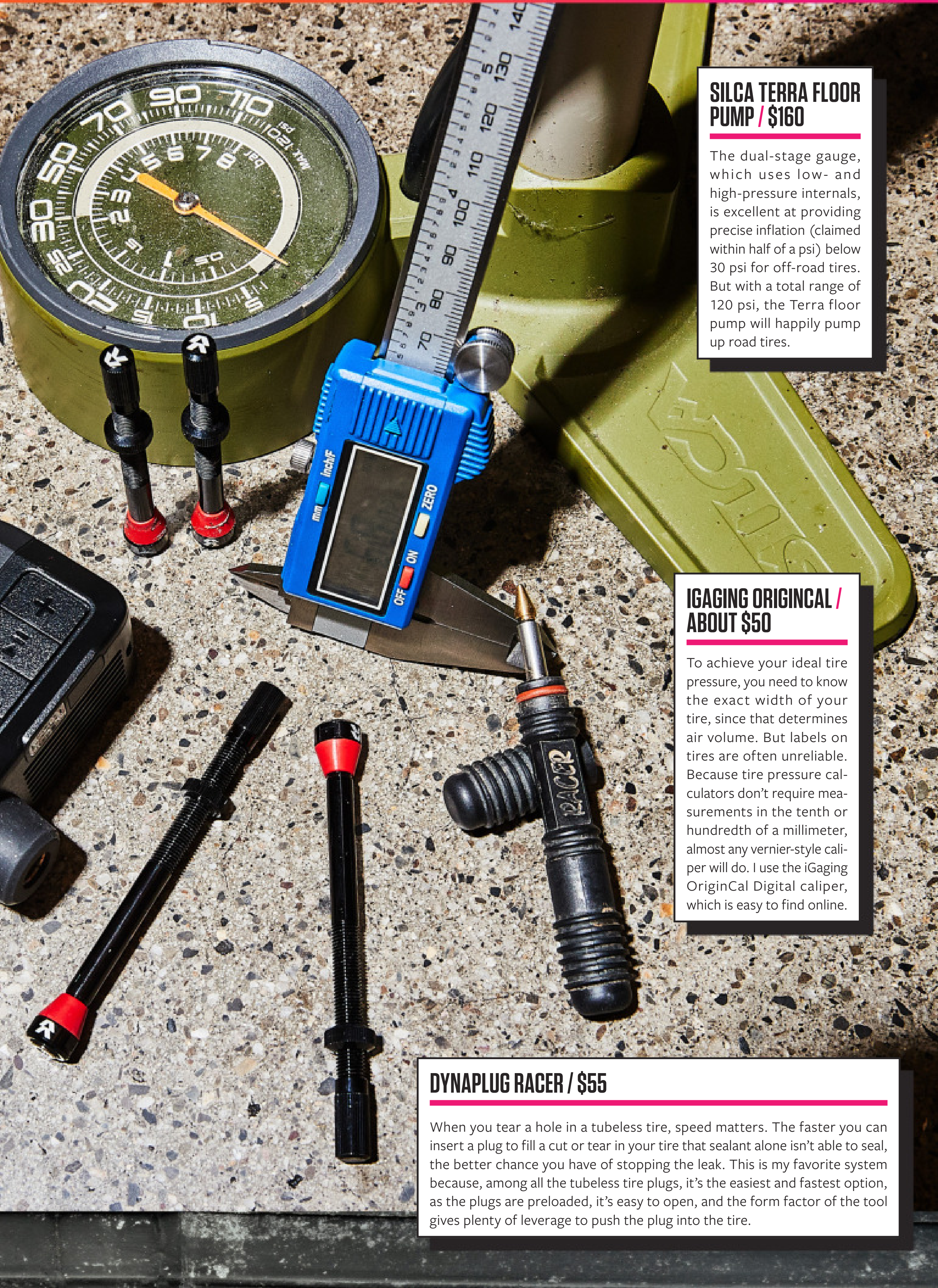
TREK
25
0
psi

TREK AIR RUSH INFLATOR / $99

I've tested at least 10 mini inflators, which are small, handheld electronic pumps that can inflate a tire multiple times on a single charge. But I keep coming back to the Air Rush. It's light, it doesn't get hot in my hands, and it has an easy-to-read screen for effortlessly checking and setting air pressure. Plus, its gauge is so accurate that I no longer need a separate digital pressure gauge.

RESERVE FILLMORE VALVES / $50–$60

When I first got my hands on a set of these valves, I didn't expect to be that impressed. Initially, I didn't think there was a need for a fancy new valve design. Then, I put them on a set of wheels. I quickly realized I wanted these valves on every wheelset I owned. They never clog with sealant, and they make seating most tubeless tires possible by simply using a floor pump. Once you try these, you can't help but see how subpar regular presta valves perform with tubeless tires. I had thought stock valves were all any cyclist needs, but now I get it—these Fillmore valves live up to the hype and are worth every penny. The price shown is for a pair of valves.



SILCA TERRA FLOOR PUMP / $160

The dual-stage gauge, which uses low- and high-pressure internals, is excellent at providing precise inflation (claimed within half of a psi) below 30 psi for off-road tires. But with a total range of 120 psi, the Terra floor pump will happily pump up road tires.

IGAGING ORIGINCAL / ABOUT $50

To achieve your ideal tire pressure, you need to know the exact width of your tire, since that determines air volume. But labels on tires are often unreliable. Because tire pressure calculators don't require measurements in the tenth or hundredth of a millimeter, almost any vernier-style caliper will do. I use the iGaging OriginCal Digital caliper, which is easy to find online.

DYNAPLUG RACER / $55

When you tear a hole in a tubeless tire, speed matters. The faster you can insert a plug to fill a cut or tear in your tire that sealant alone isn't able to seal, the better chance you have of stopping the leak. This is my favorite system because, among all the tubeless tire plugs, it's the easiest and fastest option, as the plugs are preloaded, it's easy to open, and the form factor of the tool gives plenty of leverage to push the plug into the tire.

MYTHS, TIPS, AND SURPRISING BENEFITS TO ACHIEVING THE BEST TIRE PRESSURE

A secret to going faster and being more comfortable on your bike is finding the perfect tire pressure for your setup—and that hinges on rolling resistance. It's a phenomenon that combines physics, tire composition, and how we ride a bike in the real world.

"Rolling resistance is fundamentally the loss of energy to heat—what happens as your tire compresses, rebounds, and loses efficiency at every rotation," says Joshua Poertner, the CEO of Silca, who has been obsessed with the topic for over two decades. It's a tricky subject that has tripped up many cyclists, and even brainy bike engineers, for a long time. Here are a couple facts that will help you achieve a faster, more comfortable ride.

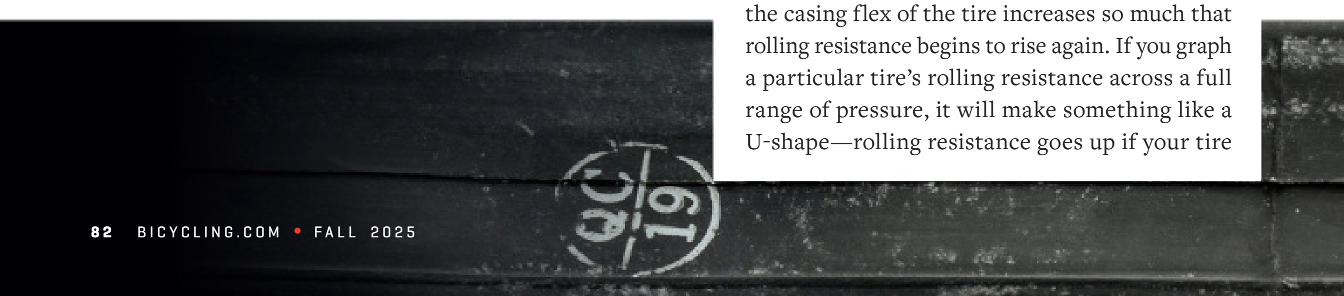
HIGHER PRESSURE IS NOT MORE EFFICIENT / In the past two decades, the width of tires has steadily increased, nearly doubling on some styles of bikes. And as tires have gotten wider, the ideal air pressure has fallen. Professional road riders in 2005 might have been riding 21mm tires with 120 pounds per square inch (psi). At the time, tire engineers, bike designers, and even riders themselves believed that a narrower tire, inflated until it felt like it was filled with hardened cement, made the least amount of contact with the road. In their terms, it had a small "contact patch" that, they thought, reduced the amount of friction with the road. Less friction, the thinking went, meant increased speed.

HOW BIKE ENGINEERS GOT ROLLING RESISTANCE WRONG / In the 1970s, which were the early days of tire testing, engineers used large, smooth metal drums to simulate the road in the lab. In those tests, limiting how much the tire casing flexed improved rolling resistance. Engineers call these casing inefficiencies "hysteresis losses." In those early tests, increasing air pressure had a measurable benefit. But what's true on a perfectly smooth surface in lab testing isn't true in the real world.

Poertner says finding the ideal tire pressure requires considering another crucial factor, called impedance, which he describes as energy losses through the shaking or vibrations experienced by the rider. "If tires are too hard, the road essentially makes the rider do push-ups—vibrating muscles, dissipating energy, and generating unnecessary fatigue," Poertner says.

Even fresh pavement or concrete has thousands of tiny bumps. Tires deform around those imperfections, thanks to casing flex. As pressure increases, the tire deforms less and starts to bounce, causing energy losses in the form of vibration for the rider and decreased forward momentum for the bike. Poertner credits independent engineer Tom Anhalt with making this discovery around 2007. While Poertner was an engineer at Zipp, he successfully replicated the finding in real-world testing across various tire sizes and pressures.

WHEN IN DOUBT, GO LOWER / As you increase or decrease a tire's pressure toward the optimal number, rolling resistance will start to fall. This trend will continue until the point at which the casing flex of the tire increases so much that rolling resistance begins to rise again. If you graph a particular tire's rolling resistance across a full range of pressure, it will make something like a U-shape—rolling resistance goes up if your tire



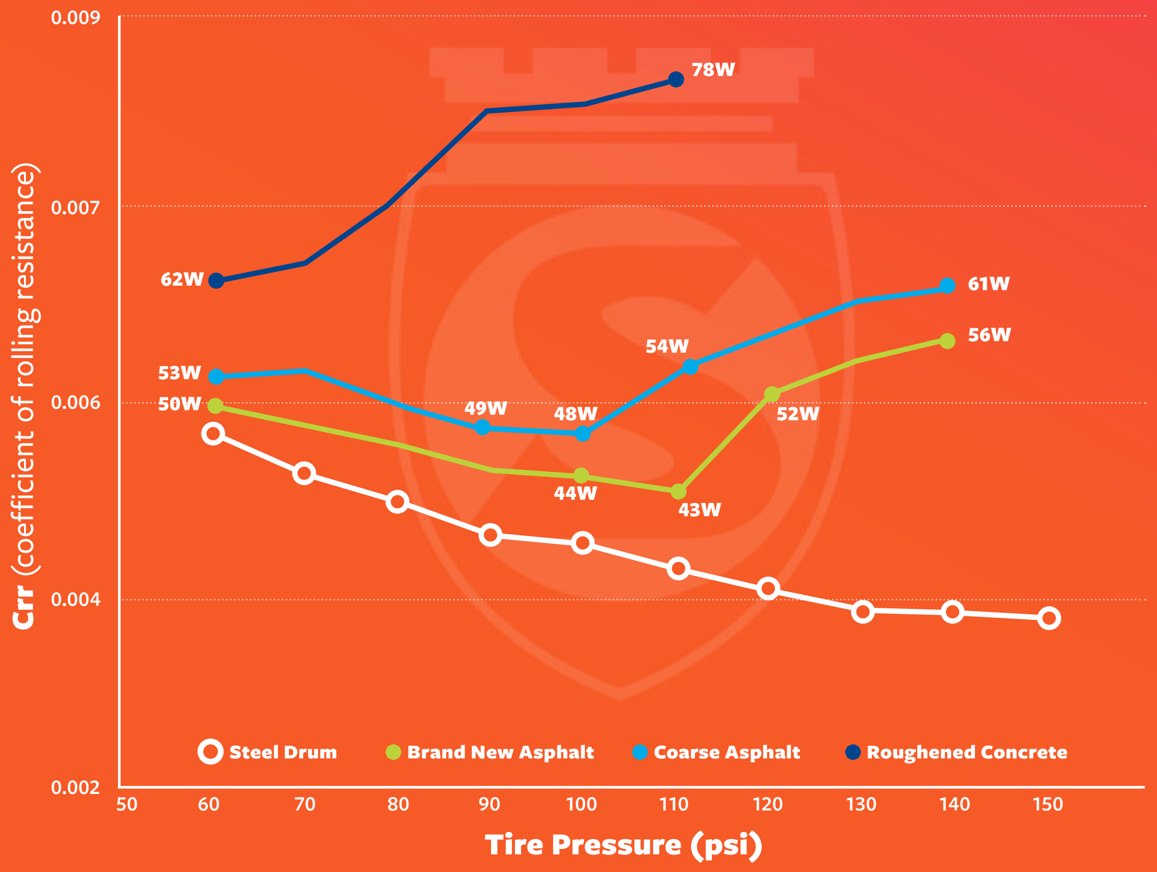
pressure is too low or too high.

"The key point for riders to grasp is that they are much better off [from both a rolling resistance and comfort point of view] going a few psi too low than a few psi too high," says Poertner. "This is because the impedance side of the rolling resistance curve goes up at a much faster rate."

For riders who are optimizing performance, Poertner's testing has found that across various pavement types, riders could save between three and nine watts (per wheel) at an optimized pressure versus being 10 psi higher. But going 10 psi below that ideal produces much smaller wattage losses—just one watt per wheel.

YOUR RIDE JUST GOT MORE COMFORTABLE / What if you don't care that much for watts or going incrementally faster? Paying attention to air pressure probably matters even more because the greatest tangible benefit of running a lower tire pressure is the increased comfort you feel from reduced jostling and shaking on the bike.

Tire Rolling Resistance at Various Pressures on Three Road Surfaces



In 2014, Silca engineers tested tire rolling resistance at various pressures on three different road surfaces. The test used 25mm Continental GP4000 tires on Zipp 404 wheels. They tested them on fresh asphalt, coarse asphalt, and rough concrete. Then they compared their results to drum testing done in a lab. The results show that in real-world conditions, rolling resistance decreases as the tire's pressure increases, until the vibrations caused by the road at high pressures add resistance. In this test, the ideal pressure was around 100 psi; however, using wider modern tires would lower that to approximately 80 psi.

Chart courtesy Silca

CHOOSE THE RIGHT TUBE FOR YOUR TIRES

MATERIAL: **BUTYL** / PRICE: **$6–$12** / WEIGHT: **100g–150g (700 x 28)**

This is the style of tube that has been inside almost every bike tire since the 1950s. Butyl, a synthetic rubber primarily made from isobutylene, is cheap and durable, and holds air extremely well, losing only about one psi per day. Tubes made from butyl are not light, though—weighing 100 grams or more per tube. Plus, butyl lacks the elasticity of latex and TPU, so it creates more rolling resistance than the other tube types.

BEST FOR Any rider who values ease of use and low maintenance.
ADVANTAGES Cheap, repairable, excellent air retention, wide availability in every tire size.
DISADVANTAGES Heavy and slower rolling resistance.

MATERIAL: **LATEX** / PRICE: **$15–$25** /
WEIGHT: **80g (700 x 28)**

Natural latex rubber tubes actually predate butyl. But butyl's superior air retention made it the dominant option for decades. Latex tubes have made a significant comeback in racing over the last five years, thanks to their improved rolling resistance, lower weight, and enhanced comfort compared to butyl tubes.

BEST FOR Racers and riders looking to maximize speed and comfort, without the hassle of tubeless.

ADVANTAGES Lowest rolling resistance, lighter than butyl, and more comfortable.

DISADVANTAGES Can lose as much as 10 psi per day; needs to be pumped up before every ride.

MATERIAL: **TPU** / PRICE: **$10–$40** /
WEIGHT: **25g–40g (700 x 28)**

Thermoplastic polyurethane tubes are the latest evolution in tubes. They are incredibly light, pack up as small as a mini Clif Bar, and roll nearly as fast as a latex inner tube.

BEST FOR Weight weenies and racers who are willing to pay for the lightest, most compact tube option.

ADVANTAGES Ultra light, excellent air retention, and good rolling resistance.

DISADVANTAGES Expensive and requires a TPU-specific patch kit.

HOW TO DETERMINE THE PERFECT TIRE PRESSURE

Achieving the right tire pressure will transform your rides—making you both faster and more comfortable. It's the best upgrade you can make for your bike that doesn't cost a dime. Just know that there's no single ideal tire pressure. The right number will change with your bike weight, tires, wheels, how much gear you are carrying, and the type of terrain you're riding.

For example, my total weight on my road bike is 162 pounds. That includes my weight, plus my bike and gear. My go-to road setup has Cadex Cotton Aero tires that measure 31mm on my wheels, and I run TPU tubes. I'll set my pressures to 64 psi front and 66 psi rear when heading out for a fast group ride. On longer rides where I'm less concerned about speed, using the same setup, I'll drop my pressure down to 58 psi front and 60 psi rear.

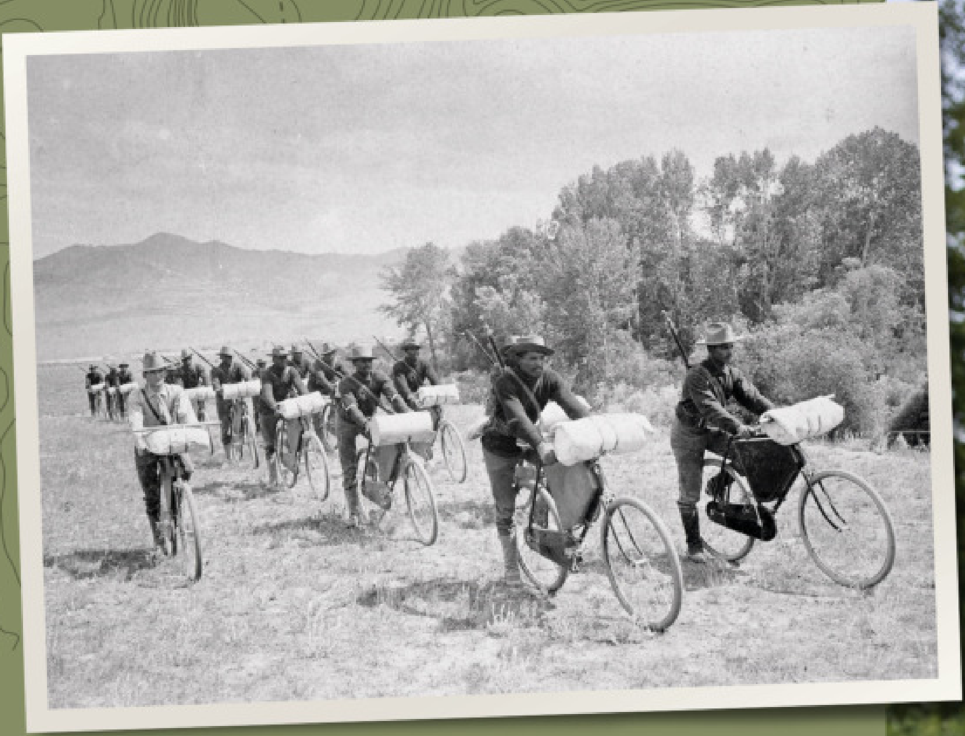
Maybe the biggest factor in choosing my tire pressure are the roads that I tend to ride. They are the typical roads of eastern Pennsylvania with constant cracks, bumps, loose gravel, and the occasional pothole. If I were riding somewhere with freshly paved roads (all other things staying the same), I'd increase my pressure to 68 psi front and 70 psi rear.

To get the correct number, I rely on online tire-pressure calculators. I recommend you do, too, because they provide fast results based on your equipment, weight, road or trail surface, and other factors. These three are the best ones I've found.

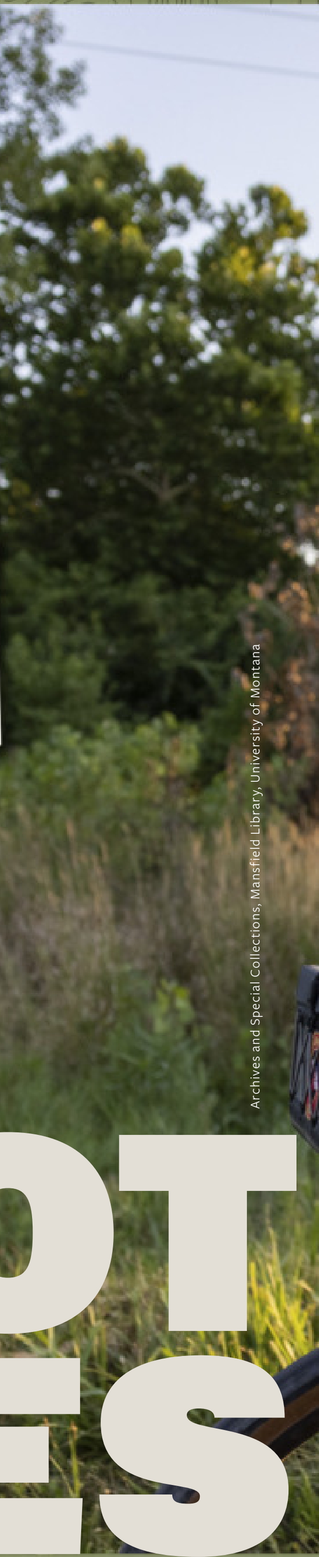
SILCA → *Best for* Fast rides on hard surfaces. *What I like* Factors in riders' speed; simplest of the three to use.

WOLF TOOTH → *Best for* Dirt trails and roads. *What I like* Prioritizes comfort and grip; separate inputs for the temperature when you inflate your tire and what you expect the temperature to be when you ride. That's an important distinction when it comes to tire pressure.

ZIPP → *Best for* Hookless road wheels. *What I like* It won't recommend pressures over the hookless limit of 72.5 psi. ***B***



Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana



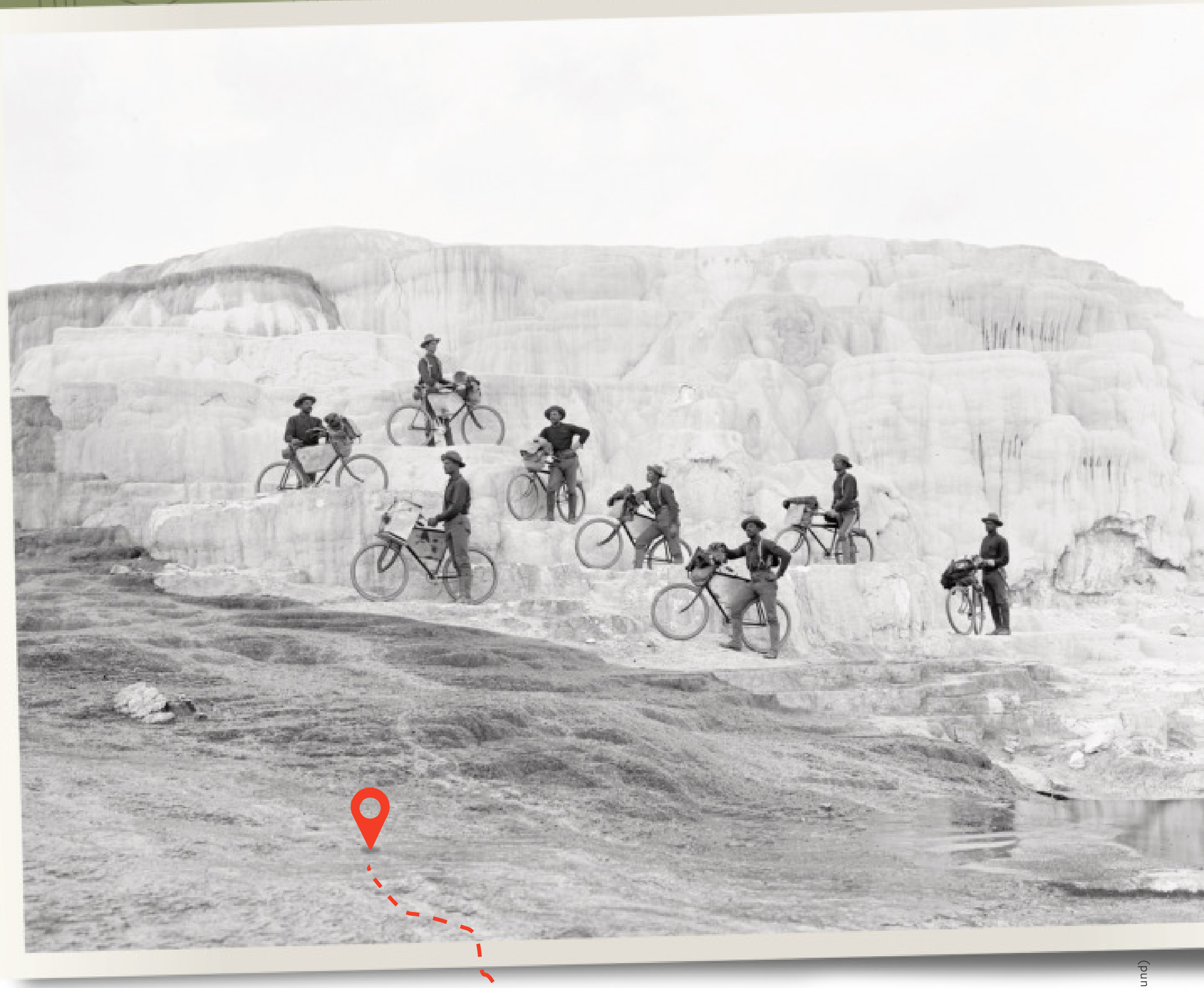
IN THE SLIPSTREAM OF CYCLING’S FORGOT HEROES

TEN

My 1,900-mile ride through the American West to honor the Black soldiers of the 25th Infantry Bicycle Corps.

BY ERICK CEDEÑO AS TOLD TO LATRIA GRAHAM

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOSH CAFFREY



THE JOURNEY BEGINS WITH A PHOTOGRAPH.

In the most famous picture of the group, the men pose with their bicycles, dark military uniforms stark against the bright, almost white travertine and limestone backdrop, a spot in Yellowstone National Park known as Minerva Terrace. Each man has his hat cocked back, eyes visible, even though their faces look in different directions.

The individual expressions of the men are not clear in this grainy snapshot from 1896, but their poses carry an air of discipline and dignity, and they hold their bikes gingerly as if they are precious. The two wheels in their care are their only method of transportation back to their barracks, hundreds of miles away.

Montana Historical Society, Haynes Foundation Photograph Collection; Getty Images (background)

The thing that intrigues me, given that this is a photo from over 100 years ago, is that all the cyclists are Black.

These men were part of the 25th Infantry Regiment Bicycle Corps, one of six all-Black Army regiments that were known as Buffalo Soldiers. Informally called Iron Riders, for their mettle and fierce resolve, the Corps traversed the American West in an effort to prove the bicycle could be useful in military exercises. One of the group's earliest excursions was a 790-mile round-trip ride from their base at Fort Missoula, Montana, to Yellowstone National Park. Their next was almost 2,000 miles long; it began on June 14, 1897, and took 41 days. Newspapers called it "The Great Experiment," and readers across America were transfixed by accounts of their progress as they pedaled from Fort Missoula to St. Louis, Missouri.

But somewhere along the way, the heroics of these men disappeared from memory. Even as an avid cyclist and history buff, I had never heard of them until 2011, when I stumbled upon their story in *Dirt Rag* magazine. I had been wanting to know more about the first people to travel America by bicycle. With this photograph I got a partial answer, but there was precious little information about the individual men and no firsthand accounts written by the Black riders themselves.

Later I would find additional photos. In one of them, the group have their bicycles over their shoulders while attempting to cross a swift waterway. In another, the men push their bikes up a steep incline of limestone, the high hills covered in scrub pine. The landscape differences were so sharp on this small section of the route that I struggled to imagine what they must have endured.

Understanding these men, who they were and what they did, would send me on my own 1,900-mile journey across the American West in 2022, marking the 125th anniversary of their 1897 expedition.

* * *

I DEPART FORT Missoula, Montana, at 5:40 a.m. on June 14th, just as my predecessors had. With dawn on the horizon, I start by calling out the names of some of the Black men who undertook the original journey 125 years to the day before I do. There were 20 in total: Lance Corporal William Haynes, Lance Corporal Abram Martin, Sergeant Mingo Sanders, Travis Bridges, Francis Button, John H. Cook, Hiram L. B. Dingman, John Findley, Elwood Forman, Elias Johnson, Frank L. Johnson, Sam Johnson, Eugene Jones, William Proctor, Samuel A. Reid, Richard Rout, George Scott, Sam Williamson, William Williamson, and John H. Wilson. The group was led by a 25-year-old white officer, 2nd Lieutenant James Moss, and supported by a surgeon, 1st Lieutenant (Dr.) James M. Kennedy.

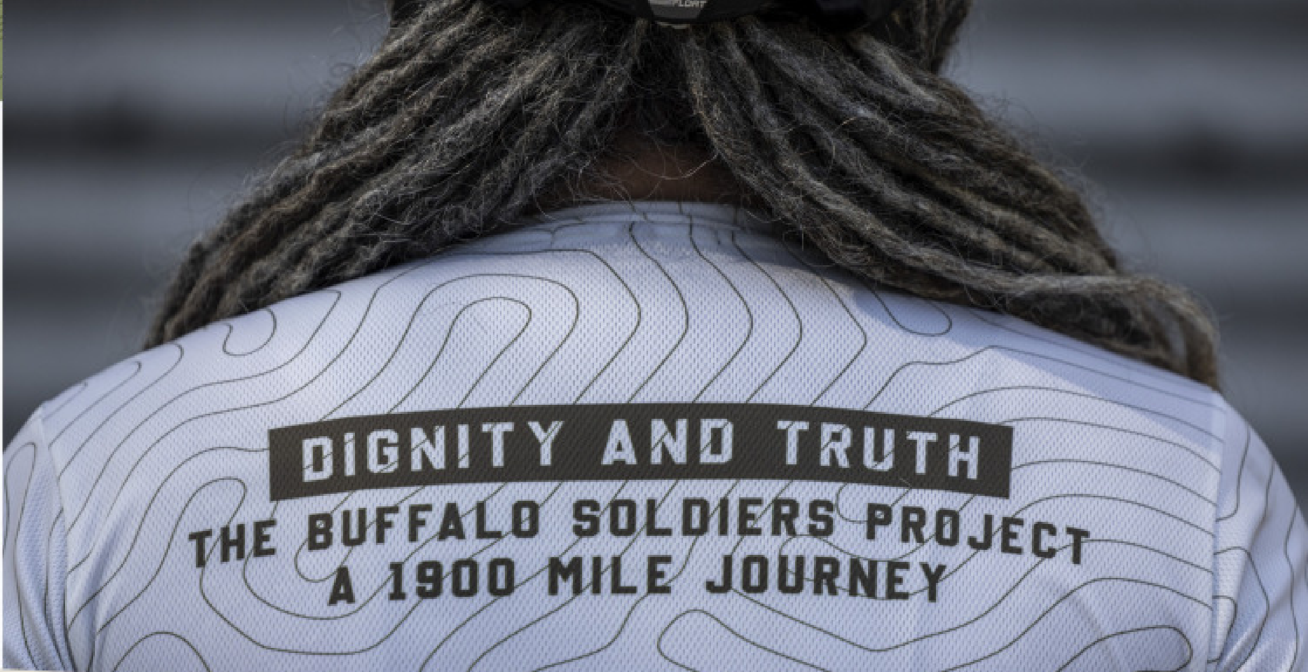
A small group of history-minded cyclists are also out to commemorate the anniversary, some of them in historical dress with vintage reproductions of the antique bicycles ridden by the Corps. Their tobacco-colored hats and bright blue shirts cut a striking figure, and we exit the grounds and ride along the compound's edge together. Soon the other riders will peel away and head back to the complex, to their cars and later to warm, comfortable homes, and I will pedal most of the rest of the way to Missouri on my own.

Modern-day researchers have few firsthand accounts of what life was like for the Bicycle Corps soldiers, but they are part of the visual culture of the time. The historical photographs carry no names, but by cross-referencing other sources, I have been able to identify some of the men. As I search their faces for clues, I understand that each is someone's relative—maybe someone's father or grandfather. These are men like me, and I don't think I would want to be forgotten if I had done something so epic.

The 1897 expedition took the 25th Infantry over underexplored terrain in Montana, Wyoming, South Dakota, Nebraska, and Missouri, demonstrating the bicycle's usefulness for military purposes—and proving the grit and discipline of the Black soldiers. Accompanied by *Daily Missoulian* correspondent Edward H. Boos, who filed regular accounts of the expedition, the group rode far and fast, averaging about 50 miles a day on singlespeed Spalding bicycles custom built for the attempt. More than 100 years later, I'm riding a brand new Niner RLT 9 Steel with some of the best components and bikepacking gear available. Still, I expect this feat to be hard.

My current relationship with the bicycle started in my early 20s, when

Opposite: Members of the Bicycle Corps on Minerva Terrace in 1896. Previous spread: Erick Cedeño near Clarksville, Missouri, July 23, 2022. Corps members ride out of Fort Missoula in 1897 (inset).



Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana

I was living in Philadelphia without a car and got around town by bike. Later when I moved back to my hometown of Miami, my first long bike ride there led me all the way down to Key West. As I pedaled south, I was enthralled with the endless expanse of ocean that unfolded in front of me. Pelicans mobbed fishing platforms. Dolphins frolicked around bridge pilings. In some sections, great white egrets picked their way through the marsh, and terns flew south above me. I had lived, off and on, in this South Florida landscape for decades, but on a bike the world slows down, and I found myself in awe of the scenery. I decided that the bicycle would be the vehicle that allowed me to travel through landscapes and history.

My ride from Missoula to St. Louis isn't my first extended bicycle trip. I traveled the Underground Railroad trail for the first time in 2014 and again in 2020. The latter journey took the form of a 32-day, 2,200-mile ride from New Orleans to Niagara Falls. On those trips I cycled through swamps and past plantations. Farther north along my route I spent time in churches with secret rooms that had once sheltered runaways with enough courage to attempt the trek to Canada. On trips like that one, and this one to Missouri, too, I spent time turning over the harsh realities of the racism these explorers and freedom-seekers faced as they tried to exert their agency, insisting that they were human beings capable of making their own choices who deserved the right to a full life.

As my rides grew longer, I wanted to know more about the history of bikepacking. I began to wonder: *Who were the first people that traveled by bicycle? Why did they do it? Where were they going?*

Time moves slowly but passes quickly, and life, inexplicably, happens. I relocated to Phoenix, opened and closed the Bicycle Nomad Café, and later moved to Santa Monica, California.

Opposite: Cedeño in Elliston, Montana, June 16, 2022. Above right: Cedeño's mission is printed on his jersey. Center: The Bicycle Corps often rode or walked along railroad tracks.

I got married. We had a baby. Time enjoyed is not time wasted, but I knew that the 125th anniversary of the Iron Riders' expedition was rapidly approaching, and I committed to traveling the historical route they undertook so many years ago. I called the plan "Dignity and Truth: The Buffalo Soldiers Project" and put together a talk about the expedition. I wanted to tell the full story of this chapter of American history and the contributions these men made while they served our country.

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AFTER LEAVING FORT Missoula, I ride along a rutted path flanked on both sides by shoulder-high grass. Cars and big trucks speed by, the crunch of concrete underneath their powerful tires a warning about what these multi-ton machines could do to a body. Thirty-five miles outside of Missoula I think about how it is an honor to ride the same roads as the Corps members.

Most of what I know about the journey comes from Edward Boos's writings for the *Daily Missoulian* and short missives from other writers at small-town newspapers. Mist clings to the Bitterroot Mountains as I ride along, but I fare better than they did on their first day. The Iron Riders encountered heavy rain. They fought weeds and brush, dragging their bicycles through mud too thick to ride in.

I might look like a solo traveler to passersby, but I feel the spirits of the Corps members with me. And I try to connect with the ghosts of history. I call upon my predecessors, like John Findley, the group's mechanic, and ask: "*What happened here?*" Another time I ask Sergeant Mingo Sanders: "*How did being so far away from what you knew make you feel?*" At end of the first day, with one range of mountains at my back, I head east.

Near the middle of Montana, just outside the town of Three Forks, I am forced to make a choice, one that will dictate the way the rest of this trip will go. The group's original route traversed a mile-long railroad bridge that spans the width of the Missouri River. The Corps often rode along railroad tracks to stay out of what they called "gumbo mud," the sticky, clay-like soil that clung to every surface.

Cedeño holds a military challenge coin from the Buffalo Soldiers 9th & 10th (Horse) Cavalry National Association. Opposite: Visiting Fort Missoula to view historical documents from the 1897 expedition.

The railroad line that runs across the bridge is still active, and a freight train could come at any time. The bridge is the shortest way to my destination; a more circuitous route will take me anywhere between 10 and 30 miles out of my way, costing me the better part of an afternoon.

I weigh my choices. If a train comes, I will not have enough time to complete the crossing or run back across the bridge. My only refuge might be the water churning far below me. The Missouri River is wild and untamed. I contemplate underwater dangers I cannot see, like rocks, undertows, and eddies.

If I were a younger man, I might take the chance. But in my late 40s I understand that there are people waiting for me at the end of this journey, and the faces of my wife, Antoinette (Toni), and 1-year-old baby boy, Gabriel, are at the forefront of my mind. I haven't been away from them for a full week yet, and I already miss them.

I also think about my responsibility to other explorers. One of my adventure goals is to make my route replicable, so that interested cyclists can also travel the path of the Bicycle Corps. I decide to go the long way round—for my family, for my future, and for all the adventurers who follow me.

Riding through this landscape means holding several truths in tandem. Black people were present at defining moments of our country's history. They were fur traders, mountain men, and miners. This

S SHOWING THE ROUTE
US NEWSPAPER ARTICLES
INFANTRY REGIMENT
BUFFALO SOLDIERS
IRON RIDERS

was the era of Nat Love and Bill Pickett, steeped in a version of the American West that much of our culture has enshrined in books, movies, and artwork. Sometimes these men served as scouts and protectors of frontier outposts. They were utilized as interpreters and mediators who often made it possible for Europeans to settle the frontier, which meant they also participated in the genocide of Indigenous people. That is the burden of U.S. history, and we must be able to learn from and accept the past to move forward. Understanding the challenging parts of the American narrative is how we heal.

The Missouri River presented risk for Black people for hundreds of years. Before emancipation, enslaved Black people, runaways, risked everything to get to the river, a mercurial boundary for slavery. On one side of the waterway sat the pro-slavery states. On the other sat the unknown, where discrimination against Black people might be custom, but slavery was not the law. In deep winter, runaways frequently attempted to walk across the frozen river hoping to find freedom on the other side. Black people came to the edge of this waterway, understanding that freedom, or at least a new type of life, just might be on the other side.

In the historical accounts Boos mentions a tavern in the town of Big Timber, Montana, where a Civil War veteran bought a round of drinks for the men (Boos calls them “boys”). The tavern is still there, now called the Grand Hotel & Restaurant. I tell the bartender the story of my adventure so far and receive my own free drink. When I walk back outside, a rainbow arcs across the sky, and it feels like the ancestors are speaking to me. My excitement at being in the same building where the Corps once stayed makes for a sleepless night.

Eventually the mountains outside of Missoula give way to rolling hills characteristic of the middle of the state, and the landscape blooms into patches of goldenrod. And as I enter Yellowstone country, I come across a field of common camas, the pale blue petals and yellow anthers of the star-shaped flowers beckoning to me. I stop.

I wonder if the camas were blooming for Iron Riders back in 1897, too, if the riders found wonder or solace in the soft blue petals, the color of twilight, after a stunning summer sunset.

By Day 9 of their journey, there were bikes that needed fixing, a duty that fell to the Corps's mechanic, John Findley. I connect with his story the most. In photos I can always identify him because of the oversize toolbox attached to the front of his bicycle and his dappled cowhide frame bag. John Findley's bike weighed 75 pounds, more than the other men's, as he carried extra tools and parts. He worked at Imperial Bicycle Works in Chicago for four years before joining the military, making him an invaluable asset. More than once, he switched bikes with one of his colleagues, working through the night to repair the problem, then rode at a clip fast enough for him to catch up to the rest of the pack.

In that iconic photo taken on Minerva Terrace in Yellowstone National Park back in 1896, John Findley looks off beyond the frame, maybe toward his home state of Missouri, or perhaps in the direction of Fort Missoula, because after days of rain and arduous terrain, he was ready to return there.

Even in modern times, traveling across what was once considered the frontier means encountering the unexpected. I can tell you about the way the damp must have penetrated the Iron Riders' bones on the early days of the trip, leaving them cold, hungry, and tired. I now know what it meant for these men to wake up to a frigid morning in the end days of June.

Food was a challenge for the Bicycle Corps. Every couple of days there would be a ration drop along the route, and if they missed it, they would be without the flour, bacon, coffee, and replacement parts that powered their excursion. I had my own logistical problem. For over 30 years I've been plant-based, and with hundreds of miles between restaurants and grocery stores that were frequently off-route, I had to find ways to feed myself. It made for some unusual food pairings, like the peanut butter and jelly sandwich with hashbrowns wedged in it that I ate at the Stray Bullet Cafe in Ovando, Montana. They named the creation after me, and now folks can go into the restaurant and order the "Bicycle Nomad."

Cedeño descending Mullan Pass on the Continental Divide in Elliston, Montana, on June 16, 2022.

* * *

FIFTEEN DAYS IN and one-third of the way done, I understand what it means to move in synchrony with the universe, nature, and the ancestors. Much of my journey means noticing small changes in my surroundings and following my intuition. Spirits don't talk the way we expect them to, but I hold conversations with them anyway. "What did it look like when you passed through here?" I ask aloud. Painfully aware of my own body's complaints, I ask, "How did you make it through?"

I prepared for this part, trained for it. It would take me a while to understand that the mental and emotional portions of this journey would be more grueling than pushing my body across vast landscapes in 100-degree heat. Riding solo for over 1,000 miles leaves me with hundreds of hours to think. I miss Toni. I miss Gabriel. I don't think there is a way to prepare for that. When I made the decision to undertake this trip, Toni and I talked a lot about the sacrifices, but now, as I pedal toward my destination, I don't know how to articulate that half of me is here, huffing up the Continental Divide, but the other half is thinking about Toni and Gabriel, wondering what they are doing.

With little cell service and miles to make, catching up with my family in real time is unpredictable. So I watch Gabriel grow, in increments and spurts as babies often do, on my phone in replays of what has already happened. On harder days I understand that the men and I are both, in our own ways, mired in the past. I wonder if any of them had had small children during the time they were stationed at Fort Missoula, far from home. I want to know if they missed their family members, too.

Spirits don't talk, but they do send signs. Something tells me to take the day off in Gillette, Wyoming. That afternoon the sky erupts, showering pebbles of hail on everything under heaven. When I tell Stephan Zacharias, then an educator at the Campbell County Rockpile Museum in Gillette, about my decision to rest that day, he says, "The Bicycle Corps riders are protecting you." Later he sends me a clip from the town's newspaper, detailing

DESPITE THEIR HISTORIC FEAT, THESE MEN AND THEIR WORK BECAME A FOOTNOTE IN THE LARGER AMERICAN STORY.

Cedeño is greeted by members of the Buffalo Soldier community in St. Louis on the last day of his ride. Opposite: Making a quick stop at the Gateway Arch before finishing his ride on July 24, 2022.

a hailstorm so violent that the resulting ice stones "drifted seven and eight feet high." Even from beyond the grave, it seems these men have my back.

Even the animals speak to me out here. Three horses welcome me when I reach the South Dakota state line, first running beside me, striding as if they want to play. Later the group falls into a steady trot behind me, the steady *thip-thip-thip* of their hooves mingling with the sound of my tires rolling across the light red unpaved roads. We create a rhythm, human and animal existing alongside one another for just a little bit. They are beautiful, majestic creatures, and as I ride away from them, I think about what their presence—like the rainbow and the hailstorm—means for my journey.

Horses are symbols of valor and freedom. They are animals of spirit, creatures of endurance, willing to put up a fight with the hope that their zeal will never be broken. I consider their time with me as an endorsement of my determination.

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BEFORE I EMBARKED on this journey, I consulted archives and met with Wyoming-based historians like Mike Higgins, who completed this historical route in 2010, and adventure-cycling tour operator Arlen Hall, who is well-versed in planning the logistics for these types of long rides. It took more than six months to figure out the trail route and the necessary stops. A good portion of it goes through sparsely populated areas, and I would need places to sleep and ways to get water and provisions. Unlike the soldiers, I wouldn't have access to supply drops along the way.

Much of my route consists of roads mostly made of tamped-down sand from an ancient ocean. Like the men, I weave through canyons—the dust, heat, and prickly pear threats still there.

The days are long; the terrain, as well as the weather, is erratic. It never settles into a rhythm, and I am often guessing what the day will bring. The sky is always changing color—lapis, sapphire, even

cerulean. Dawn would emerge, the color of well-worn denim and whatever hue the world took on after that. It made me glad that I could head toward the horizon to explore the flora, fauna, landmarks, and stories that showed themselves to me.

Then there are days that the clouds are so thick they form a wall of slate gray. On the most challenging days, when there is the threat of bad weather, the backdrop behind me is the color of blue steel. The soldiers had endured snowstorms, torrential rain, and blistering heat. This journey puts my body through similar conditions.

Traversing high-altitude desert, alkali salt flats, and rugged, eroded terrain with minimal vegetation means that in some places, the water is high in alkaline. This was a problem for the Iron Riders, and many got sick from it, sidelining them for several days. While I can coordinate my hydration better than they could, by the time I get to Nebraska the heat is punishing, and the temperature forces me to slow down and take more breaks. In historical accounts of the Corps's ride, the Sand Hills of Nebraska are called "barren" and "god forsaken," and 125 years later, little has changed in that regard.

For all that hasn't changed since the Iron Riders made this journey, some of the landmarks and topography are dramatically different. Newcastle Salt Lake, where the men took a swim one afternoon to cool off, no longer exists. Longhorn cattle now graze in the spot that once held the lake. The names and ownership of buildings have changed, and it takes a bit of detective work to find the places where the group ate, recreated, and slept.

I get a boost on the Fourth of July, near the halfway point of my ride, in Crawford, Nebraska. When the Corps got there, they "started down Second Street at a lively gait," the *Crawford Nebraska Journal* article from that day said. "Thousands of spectators who lined the sidewalks on either side of the street rent the air with the wildest cheers to speed them on their journey."

When I arrive, I am invited to participate in the town parade. That day I am jubilant, my dappled grey dreadlocks streaming behind me as I pedal through downtown. On a high after the event, I ride the four miles to Fort Robinson, where the men slept. A national historic landmark turned state park, this fort was the home base for many units of the Buffalo Soldiers from 1885 to 1907, so photos of them are sprinkled throughout the grounds. Comforted by their faces—set and determined in each photograph I encounter—I finally fall asleep.

The next day I reach the thousand-mile mark; only 900 to go. The temperature climbs to 105 degrees. Back then the men faced conditions as hot as 110. The sand blistered their feet. Miles away from my intended campsite for the night, I am hungry, thirsty, and covered in dust. *I am not that strong*, I think. I do my best to remember why I started. As my legs cramp and my back throbs, I cling to my responsibility to finish.

When I ride into the parking lots of convenience stores, most folks approach me with curiosity. Sometimes, miles away from my next rest stop, there are trail angels who provide me with a snack or something refreshing to drink or offer a place to stay for the night. One day when I am out of tubes to fix my flat, a bike shop owner drives 75 miles out of the way to bring me some.

Sometimes the soldiers encountered this type of kindness, too. Miles away from the nearest railroad water tank where they got their water, they asked a farmer in Nebraska if they could acquire some. The farmer and his family fed them—milk, bread, cookies, and cakes, giving them a much-needed morale boost before sending them on their way.

Still, the closer the Corps got to their end goal of Missouri, a former slave state, the harsher the racism became. Several times when they went to camp for the night, they were told to move along and search for somewhere else to stay. Restaurants withheld service. On the cusp of completing an expedition that made them seem superhuman, the racial tensions here were impossible to crack.

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ON THE MORNING of July 24th, 2022, I pedal alone toward Forest Park in the heart of St. Louis, where the Corps finished their mission 125 years earlier.

I round a curve into the park and a brass band plays the *Rocky* theme song. A sizable crowd has gathered, and it includes relatives of some of the original Buffalo Soldiers. I alight from my bike, overcome by emotion (and exhaustion). The ride—2,000 miles, 55,000 feet of climbing mountains across five states—is finally over. Waiting for me in the park, at the foot of the steps of the Missouri History Museum, is my family. I cannot keep from crying. As I step on stage to talk about the ride, I look to the back of the crowd. At the top of the steps a group of Black children peer curiously at me. I wonder what they think of this moment. I wonder if they know they will soon be capable of exploring the world on their own. This is who I do it for. I don't expect everyone that engages with me to become a long-distance adventurer, but I do believe that everyone can be an advocate in their community for things like better access to bikes and safer places for residents to explore.

That day and for several days thereafter, I stand at podiums with government figures, and I am proud. This journey, which I documented on Instagram, has brought national attention for these men and their superhuman feat. The office of the mayor of the city of St. Louis issues a proclamation in their honor. The city and the Missouri House of Representatives declare July 24th, 2022, Iron Riders Day. These are honorifics that the soldiers should have received in real life, but America's celebration of the Black army on wheels was short-lived.

By the end of the Iron Riders' 41-day journey, townspeople along the route had heard of the men and their exploits. Sometimes Boos's missives were also published by newspapers along the route before subsequently being reprinted in national and international publications. When the group arrived in St. Louis, they were greeted by thousands as they rode into Forest Park.

Despite their historic feat, these men and their work became a footnote in the larger American story. Even at the end of their journey, the Black service members couldn't eat at the Cottage Hotel's restaurant like their white counterparts Boos, Kennedy, and Moss were invited to do. They also couldn't sleep in the hotel's beds or enjoy its hospitality. Instead, they camped in Forest Park and ate their celebratory meal in a nearby shed.

This type of racism was a larger nationwide attempt at suppressing the accomplishments of Black troops as a whole. By building roads and forts, maintaining order in villages, and pushing back violent threats as colonists settled the West, the Buffalo Soldiers helped build this country, but their might was no match for the subterfuge of Jim Crow and the power it held over their ability to do things that we now think of as fundamental rights.

There are so many hidden histories that deserve our attention: Company L of the 24th Infantry, for example, was a unit of Black soldiers that kept order in rough frontier towns at the height of the Klondike Gold Rush. There were the Black regiments praised for valor during the Spanish-American War and Philippine-American War, and the all-Black 369th Infantry Regiment known as the "Harlem Hellfighters" that saw more combat than all other U.S. outfits during World War I. These men served with remarkable bravery while facing discrimination because they believed that serving the country of their birth might secure the promise of full citizenship and equal rights. The U.S. military was officially desegregated on July 26, 1948. Black people would not receive full voting rights until 1965. It is a right that might not have come during the lifetime of most of the Iron Riders.

On August 18, 1897, the Bicycle Corps returned to Fort Missoula. Their mission complete, the unit was disbanded. The dawn of the automobile would spell the bicycle's demise as a potential vehicle for the military, who decided to favor trucks instead. The Spanish-American War erupted in 1898, and the 25th Infantry Regiment was dispatched to Cuba.

Some years later the unit was stationed at Fort Brown in Brownsville, Texas, and a racial incident there, known as the Brownsville Affair, hastened their descent into obscurity. Shots rang out on the streets one night in the middle of August 1906, killing one white man (local bartender Frank Natus) and wounding another. The Black soldiers at Fort Brown were blamed, even though military commanders at the fort stated that all the service members were in their barracks at the time of the shooting.

President Theodore Roosevelt ordered the Black infantrymen, 167 of them, dishonorably discharged without the benefit of due process of law guaranteed by the United States Constitution. The men would not receive their pensions, and they would be prevented from holding federal civil service jobs.

In 1972 the army conducted a new investigation into the shooting, finally pardoning the men. All but one of the 167 soldiers were dead by then.

That brings me to the dignity part of this project. Merriam-Webster defines dignity as "the quality or state of being worthy, honored, or esteemed." It's the importance and value a person has that makes them deserving of respect. These men—who earned it—did not get that honor.

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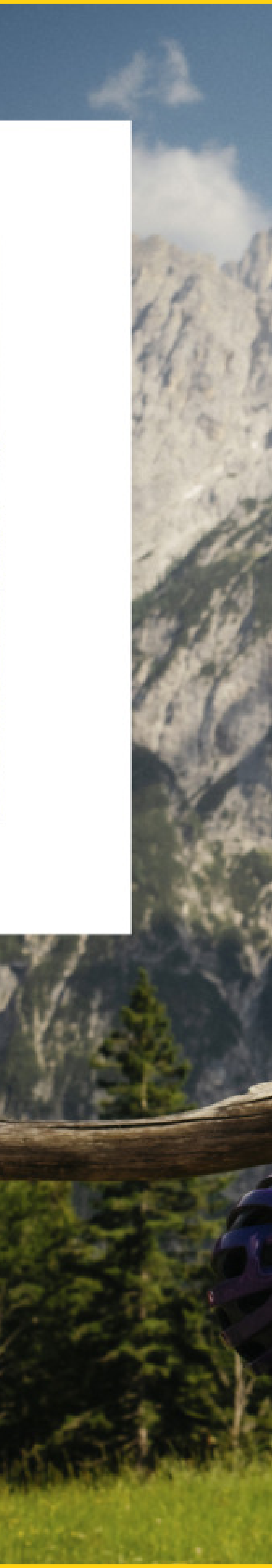
RECREATING THIS RIDE is maybe 10 percent of the work I plan to do to honor these men. I am still putting together what happened to them after their time in the army was over. Because of the dishonorable discharge, some are buried in unmarked graves. One of them is mechanic John Findley, who died on June 4, 1945. Mike Higgins worked for years to find Findley's grave. When he located it, he personally arranged for a flat gravestone marker to be placed there. The presentation is simple—his name, his position in the military, as well as his birth and death dates. Now people can seek out his resting place at Arlington Cemetery in Elmhurst, Illinois, outside of Chicago. They have a place where they can go and call his name.

Names are powerful. There is a proverb—I am not sure who to attribute it to—the gist of which is that a man is not dead while his name is still spoken. I see it as part of my purpose to make sure these men don't disappear from our country's collective memory or history books. I speak their names, tell their stories, and honor them by being a living link to their legacies, acknowledging their courage with the way I live my life.

In December 2023, I hit my own milestone: I turned 50. I continue to use my bicycle as a way to travel through history, going as far and as fast as my body and ambitions will let me. But I don't stay away too long. Gabriel is 4 now, and Toni and I welcomed another son, Joaquín, this past June. One day, I will tell them about what I've learned and all that I've seen. When I was little, maybe 2 or 3 years old, my mother told me that I could do anything I wanted to. She reminded me of that often, up until the day she died. I am determined to do more than tell my boys—I want to show them, too. ***B***



A SINGLE BIKE RIDE IS WORTH A THOUSAND BRUNCHES

You learn a lot about your friends when you share a bed and chamois cream.

WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY **JAKE STANGEL**

BEAT THE CLOCK

A HARD DAY ON THE BIKE HAS AN UNCANNY WAY OF SHOWCASING YOUR BEST AND WORST TRAITS.

Over and over and over. You're simply too exposed to hide behind any of it. Your friends can either love you for it or tolerate you—or, at worst, quietly start doing different rides without you that you only discover later on Strava. But that's showbiz, baby.

I've always said a single bike ride is worth a thousand brunches. You can talk fluff for an hour on a Sunday over pancakes, but a rowdy bike ride will reveal your soul to your friends, whether or not you're even talking. Are you generous with a pull? Do you have a good attitude riding through a cow-hoof-pocked pasture? Are you patient while your friend fixes that flat? Do you crumble halfway up that last remote climb, or do you spin it into physical comedy about how silly the whole situation is? Like, stuck on the back side of a mountain, no water—ha!

As I age in human years toward 40 and bike years toward 25, my circle of riding friends has grown smaller but so much tighter. I see these folks as much off the bike as on the bike. We don't really talk about bikes while riding bikes. It's too meta—you

Christian in our hotel, waiting for laundry to dry (above). Approaching the Soča Valley in Slovenia (right). Previous spread: Descending a Slovenian gravel road through a cow pasture after hiking our bikes up a mile or two of 5-foot-tall grasses on the other side of the mountain (left). Christian and Ross (left to right) near Tarvisio alpine resort in northeastern Italy.

“NO MALE LONELINESS HERE!” WHICH KIND OF BECAME THE CATCHPHRASE OF THE TRIP.

can only talk about cassette gearing for so long. But every ride covers relationships and headspace, challenges and joys, peppered with light and topical things as well. Little therapy sessions. We've all found ourselves in the same three-ring Venn diagram of being chatty, if not deep in conversation; loving *insalata mista* gravel ("hybrid surface," as Pas Normal calls it, le sigh); and riding seriously without taking it too seriously.

Ross and Christian sit closest to the center of the diagram. When strife between good friends hits, I find, you enter a critical juncture: The friendship withers because there isn't mutual investment in finding a way forward, or else you both have enough conviction in the relationship to dig deep, work through the shit, and come out stronger and more understanding of each other.

A dip in a magical, clear river approaching Sutrio, Italy (left). Ross stretching on our last day into Trieste (above).

The three of us have gone through this process multiple times. Spending hundreds of hours on the bike together has kept our bond strong, understanding, and ever-growing. At this point, we feel more like brothers. I love them. And I love taking photos of them. My little muses.

After Covid subsided, we began to take annual summer tours through Europe's majestic mountain ranges. We rode across the Pyrenees, then did the Alps via the Torino-Nice Rally route last year, and in June of this year, the northern edge of the Italian Dolomites and Slovenia. Two additional friends joined: Nick, a friend of Ross's, and Ed, the best bike handler I know, a consistent and grounding presence in my life, and a beautiful soul.

These tours are one of the best ways we know how to spend holiday time, and this year was no

different: a mix of nose-to-the-ground exploration of land and culture, butchering the Italian language at local refugios, trying a thousand new cheeses, puzzling over why Italian table bread and Italian table napkins have the same texture, basically living with our brains fully turned on and tuned in.

As I shot these photos, I was after the little visual anecdotes and memory cues that surround the experience of riding bikes and what that exploring affords you emotionally. I was also after the intimate male gaze that comes with a tight-knit group who've known each other for years and have dropped all protective pretense. Ross texted a selfie of the five of us—limbs tangled, sitting clustered at a biergarten table covered in empty pint glasses and a ravaged cheese board, smiling like shelled and happy little kids—to his friend Emily, who wrote back, "no male loneliness here!" which kind of became the catchphrase of the trip.

If leaving your house and riding for a half day with friends is a bonding experience, lord knows what to call spending 10 straight days riding together, sleeping in the same beds, eating three

The daily ritual of the hotel-sink clothing wash (above). The reality of riding in the Dolomites settles in after the group makes it to the top of a soul-crushing four-mile, 2,500-foot climb (right).

WE DON'T REALLY TALK ABOUT BIKES WHILE RIDING BIKES. **IT'S TOO META.**

meals a day (plus all the snacks), discussing the nuances of your digestive systems. Each day, you'll have moments at your best (shouting punchlines of *Saturday Night Live* skits while climbing a 20 percent grade) and at your worst (shelled and needing space on a 20 percent grade). It pushes the group to communicate and engage. Which is what these trips are all about: doing something tough to be exposed to each other in unfettered, non-brunch form. You find yourself in a relationship that veers closer to siblings than friends, brimming with intimacy and unguardedness that is a beautiful reflection on what makes us human, what makes us seek connection, and what brings us profound joy. Bicycles are just the accelerator.***B***

A hotel clerk snapped this group shot right after we arrived to our finish spot in Trieste (above). Opposite (from top): Descending through forest toward Sutrio, Italy. Ed's expression as we round a corner and finally catch sight of our refugio after a long day. Bed sheets drying somewhere in Italy, about a day's ride from Trieste.

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15. EXTENT AND NATURE OF CIRCULATION

	Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months	No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date
A. Total Number of Copies (Net press run)	45,267	69,270
B. Paid Circulation		
(1) Mailed Outside-County Paid Subscriptions Stated on PS Form 3541 (Include paid distribution above nominal rate, advertiser's proof copies, and exchange copies)	28,092	43,000
(2) Mailed In-County Paid Subscriptions Stated on PS Form 3541 (Include paid distribution above nominal rate, advertiser's proof copies, and exchange copies)	n/a	n/a
(3) Paid Distribution Outside the Mails Including Sales Through Dealers and Carriers, Street Vendors, Counter Sales, and Other Paid Distribution Outside USPS®	2,667	5,000
(4) Paid Distribution by Other Classes of Mail Through the USPS (e.g., First-Class Mail)	n/a	n/a
C. Total Paid Distribution (Sum of 15b (1), (2), (3), and (4))	30,759	48,000
D. (1) Free or Nominal Rate Outside-County Copies included on PS Form 3541	2,064	5,540
(2) Free or Nominal Rate In-County Copies Included on PS Form 3541	n/a	n/a
(3) Free or Nominal Rate Copies Mailed at Other Classes Through the USPS (e.g., First-Class Mail)	n/a	n/a
(4) Free or Nominal Rate Distribution Outside the Mail (Carriers or other means)	1,623	3,455
E. Total Free or Nominal Rate Distribution (Sum of 15d (1), (2), (3) and (4))	3,687	8,995
F. Total Distribution (Sum of 15c and 15e)	34,446	56,995
G. Copies not Distributed	10,822	12,275
H. Total (Sum of 15f and g)	45,267	69,270
I. Percent Paid (15c divided by 15f times 100)	89.30%	84.22%
16. Electronic copy circulation		
A. Requested and Paid Electronic Copies	13,201	28,200
B. Total Requested and Paid Print Copies and Requested/Paid Electronic Copies (Line 15c)	43,960	76,200
C. Total Requested Copy Distribution (Line 15f) and Requested/Paid Electronic Copies	47,648	85,195
D. Percent Paid and/or Requested Circulation (Both print & Electronic Copies	92.26%	89.44%

Publication of Statement of Ownership: If the publication is a general publication, publication of this statement is required. Will be printed in the Fall 2025 issue of this publication.

Signature and Title of Editor, Publisher, Business Manager, or Owner: Brian Madden. I certify that all information furnished on this form is true and complete. I understand that anyone who furnishes false or misleading information on this form or who omits material or information requested on the form may be subject to criminal sanctions (including fines and imprisonment) and/or civil sanctions (including civil penalties).

United States District Court for the Central District of California

In re Shimano Crankset Litigation

If you purchased, received, were given and/or owned a Shimano Hollowtech II Crankset manufactured before July 2019, or a bicycle equipped with such a crankset, in the United States, you may be eligible to receive benefits from a class action settlement.

A court has authorized this Notice. This is not a solicitation from a lawyer.

A settlement has been reached in a class action lawsuit against Shimano North America Bicycle, Inc. and Shimano North America Holding, Inc. (together, "Shimano"), and Specialized Bicycle Components, Inc., Trek Bicycle Corporation, and Giant Bicycle, Inc. (collectively, "Defendants"). In September 2023, Shimano voluntarily recalled Shimano Hollowtech II cranksets in the United States that had been manufactured before July 2019 (the "Voluntary Recall"). Plaintiffs alleged breaches of warranties, and sought relief in connection with the advertising and marketing of Defendants' products and the alleged inadequacy of the voluntary recall. There are no allegations that Plaintiffs have suffered any physical injuries from the cranksets involved.

Who is Included? You are a Settlement Class Member entitled to receive benefits under the Settlement if the following Settlement Class definition applies to you: all Persons who purchased, received, were given, and/or owned a Designated Crankset (defined below) in the United States, other than solely for resale purposes. This includes, without limitation, Persons who purchased, received, were given, or owned a bicycle equipped with a Designated Crankset.

Designated Crankset means any of the following Shimano cranksets manufactured before July 2019: Ultegra FC-6800, Ultegra FC-R8000, Dura-Ace FC-9000, Dura-Ace FC-R9100 and Dura-Ace FC-R9100-P, with any of the following production codes: KF, KG, KH, KI, KJ, KK, KL, LA, LB, LC, LD, LE, LF, LG, LH, LI, LJ, LK, LL, MA, MB, MC, MD, ME, MF, MG, MH, MI, MJ, MK, ML, NA, NB, NC, ND, NE, NF, NG, NH, NI, NJ, NK, NL, OA, OB, OC, OD, OE, OF, OG, OH, OI, OJ, OK, OL, PA, PB, PC, PD, PE, PF, PG, PH, PI, PJ, PK, PL, QA, QB, QC, QD, QE, QF, QG, QH, QI, QJ, QK, QL, RA, RB, RC, RD, RE, and RF.

What Does the Settlement Provide? If you are a Settlement Class Member, you may be eligible to receive the following Settlement benefits.

1. **Extended Warranty** – For Designated Cranksets otherwise covered by Shimano's Express Warranty, Shimano will extend the duration of the Express Warranty to July 29, 2027. This extension applies only to the Express Warranty's coverage of bonding separation and delamination of the Shimano Designated Crankset. Delamination refers to the early stages of separation at the interface (the part where the two parts are bonded together) between the crank set body and cover. Evidence of delamination may include signs of corrosion and breaking. **You do not need to submit a Claim Form to receive extended Express Warranty coverage, it will be extended automatically.**

2. **Enhanced Inspection** – Under the Voluntary Recall, consumers were advised to contact a retailer in the United States that is authorized by Shimano to conduct inspections (a "Recall Retailer") to schedule a free inspection of Designated Cranksets. Under this Settlement, Shimano agreed to enhance that inspection by: (1) distributing to every Recall Retailer a magnifying device with enhanced lighting; (2) distributing the Approved Enhanced Manual to Recall Retailers; (3) making Shimano employees available to Recall Retailers during normal business hours in California to advise about how to perform inspections; (4) requiring Recall Retailers to affirm that they have reviewed and will utilize all materials provided by Shimano related to the Inspections; (5) instructing Recall Retailers to make certain information available to Settlement Class Members whose Designated Crankset passes an inspection; and (6) providing public outreach regarding the Voluntary Recall; and

3. **Reimbursement of Costs** – Settlement Class Members may submit a Claim Form with supporting documentation to receive reimbursement of reasonable out-of-pocket costs for purchasing a replacement crankset and installing it on their bicycle. Reimbursement is not available if (a) the Designated Crankset was replaced on or after September 21, 2023, or (b) at the time of replacement, the Express Warranty was not expired as to that Designated Crankset. For Ultegra FC-6800 and FC-R8000 Designated Cranksets, the Express Warranty expired two years after the date of original retail purchase. For Dura-Ace FC-9000, R9100, and FC-R9100-P Designated Cranksets, the Express Warranty expired three years after the date of original retail purchase.

Other Options. If you do not want the benefits of an extended warranty or reimbursed costs from this Settlement, but you instead want to keep the right to sue or continue to sue Defendants and the Released Persons on your own about the legal issues in this lawsuit, then you must submit an opt-out **postmarked** by **December 29, 2025**. If you do not opt-out, you may object to the Settlement, including the requested Attorneys' Fees Award and Service Awards, by filing an objection by **December 29, 2025**. The Long Form Notice on the Settlement Website explains how to opt-out or object. If you do nothing, you will not be reimbursed for your costs for replacement and installation. You will give up your right to start a lawsuit, continue with a lawsuit, or be part of any other lawsuit against the Released Persons about the legal claims that are released by the Settlement.

Final Approval Hearing. The Court will hold a Final Approval Hearing on **February 2, 2026**, to consider whether the Settlement is fair, reasonable, and adequate, and decide whether to approve the Settlement, Class Counsel's attorneys' fees and costs, and Service Awards. If you file a timely objection, you (or your lawyer) may ask to appear at the hearing, and the Court may hear objections at the hearing.

This notice is a summary. Learn more at www.ShimanoCranksetSettlement.com or call toll free 1-888-873-3150.

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